

Anti-summit plot foiled

SECURITY forces say they have scored another significant victory against Islamist militants by arresting 62 persons suspected of being members of a terrorist group which had planned several armed attacks in Cairo during the Arab Summit, reports Jallan Halawi.

The head of the group, Hossameddin Abdel-Fattah Shehata, and five accomplices were arrested on 21 June as they prepared to hold up a jewellery store in Giza during Friday prayers, the police say. Shehata, an ex-teacher, is said to have been a close associate of Talaat Yassin Hammad, the head of the Gama'a, an armed wing, who was killed in a shoot-out with the police in April 1994. Shehata has been on the run from the police since 1990.

According to a Ministry of Interior statement released yesterday, the hold-up was to mark the start of a series of attacks timed to coincide with the arrival of Arab heads of state for the two-day summit in Cairo.

Police arrested other suspected members of the ring in simultaneous raids in Cairo, Giza and the northern Nile Delta region just before the attacks were planned to take place.

The Gama'a militants had planned to carry out attacks against vital installations, senior government and security officials and the media during the summit on Saturday and Sunday, the police say.

Police also say they have seized 120 kilograms of TNT explosives, guns, bombs and ammunition at the homes of the arrested militants, along with Gama'a publications and fake number plates.

Serraj freed

THE PALESTINIAN National Authority yesterday released Dr Eyad Serraj, head of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights, 16 days after arresting him. But Palestinian Attorney-General Khaled Al-Kidrah said Serraj might still be put on trial for allegedly assaulting a policeman during detention.

The Palestinian high court gave the PNA five days to respond to an appeal by Serraj on 13 June and set a hearing date of 1 July when no response was submitted. Serraj, a 53-year-old psychiatrist, is a leading critic of corruption and restrictions on freedom of expression under PNA rule. His arrest triggered sharp international criticism from human rights organisations which appealed for his release.

Border attack

THREE Israeli soldiers in a border patrol were shot dead and two more injured yesterday in an attack by an Arab gunman near Naaran, a Jewish settlement in the West Bank. One of the gunmen was also killed in the exchange of fire. The attack, which occurred near the Jordanian border, was the first fatal confrontation in the Occupied Territories since Israel's new right-wing government assumed office last week.

A hardline Palestinian group, Al-Itiha, a break-away movement from Yasser Arafat's main Fatah faction based in Damascus, said it carried out the attack through one of its groups working in the Occupied Territories. Jordan denied that the attackers infiltrated the West Bank across the Jordanian border.

Little offered in US shuttle

Christopher's visit to Cairo has done little to assuage apprehensions at Netanyahu's intransigence and its consequences for peace

American Secretary of State Warren Christopher, arrived in Cairo from Jerusalem yesterday morning for talks with President Hosni Mubarak and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat following his meeting with Israel's newly elected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The declared aim of Christopher's first Middle East visit since the right-wing coalition government assumed power in Israel was to seek common ground between Israel and the Arabs after Netanyahu had announced his opposition to the peace-for-land formula — the basis of Arab-Israeli negotiations since the Madrid Conference in 1991. Little, though, has been achieved in this respect.

The Egyptian president met with Christopher for one hour, after which Mubarak left the presidential palace without issuing any statements to the press. Christopher remained to hold talks with Arafat, during which they were joined by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. The three held a news conference following the meeting.

Moussa described the one-hour talks between President Mubarak and Christopher as "very fruitful and important". He confirmed that Netanyahu had been invited to talks in Cairo before President Mubarak embarks on his trip to Washington, scheduled for late July. Top of the agenda for the Washington trip will be the peace process, and how to guarantee "a positive and sustained continuity of the process on the basis we all agreed upon within the framework of Madrid". Moussa stressed that the provisions of Madrid were not "preconditions but are *sine qua non* for the peace process to continue."

Arafat told reporters: "We reaffirmed completely our commitment to the peace process and hope the Israelis will show equal commitment." He demanded completion of all the stipulations of the Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement, including Hebron redeployment, the immediate release of Palestinian detainees and the provision of a safe passage between the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

But in the absence of Washington applying pressure on the new Israeli government the Palestinians remain pessimistic about Israel meeting any of its commitments. Arafat had hoped Christopher would have been able to arrange a meeting between him and Netanyahu, though Christopher appears so far unable to gain any concessions from the new prime minister, concerning either a meeting or an Israeli pull-out from Hebron.

The American secretary of state told reporters that he had briefed Mubarak on his meeting with Netanyahu the day before. Avoiding questions on whether the US will exercise any pressure on Israel to implement agreements signed with the Palestinians, Christopher insisted that the time was ripe for agreements between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. "The US believes that there should be discussions between Israel and Syria," he said, committing the US to "help them resolve the differences that they bring to the negotiating table."

Christopher stressed that final decisions de-

pend on the hard work of negotiations, "which is what lies ahead for the parties as they seek to achieve peace". As for Netanyahu's willingness to make concessions, Christopher only offered a general statement that "the new Israeli government understands its obligations under the agreements".

Arabs, who understand those obligations in terms of the land-for-peace formula stressed in the final communiqué of the Cairo summit, were naturally dismayed when, in Israel, Christopher earlier stated that "the Arab summit resolutions would not make a useful document for negotiating purposes."

"But why didn't we hear similar comments from Mr Christopher when the Israeli government said 'no, no, no' to every basis of negotiation?" Maher El-Sayed, Egyptian ambassador to Washington, told the *Weekly*.

Arabs remain apprehensive that the American administration is prioritising its strategic relations with Israel and that, given the importance the US attaches to Israel's military role in the region as a counterbalance to the so-called rogue states of Iran, Iraq and Libya, US ties with Israel will continue to grow stronger.

In Washington State Department officials said Christopher had achieved what he set out to in Israel. "He was there to underscore the importance of the strategic relationship between the US and Israel. That's number one," said an administration official.

In light of such statements Arabs feel that US policy has changed to accommodate the position of Israel's new prime minister, and that the "land-for-peace" formula conceived in Madrid is now being overshadowed by an insistence that all parties to the peace process should have "no prior conditions".

Apprehension is strongest among the Palestinians. They are concerned that Christopher is meeting Arafat in Cairo rather than inside the Palestinian self-rule areas, a change they perceive as an indirect message from the American administration that any access to Washington will now be conditional on Israeli approval.

A Palestinian source close to President Arafat revealed to the *Weekly* that Christopher had earlier presented Arafat with a proposal that a Palestinian-Israeli joint security committee be established, its aims and operational mechanisms to be defined by Israel in accordance with its security needs.

This, the source told the *Weekly*, "makes of the Palestinian National Authority something similar to Lahad's army in South Lebanon, and of the Palestinian self-rule areas something akin to Israel's self-proclaimed security zone in South Lebanon." Such a role for the Palestinian National Authority runs counter to any Palestinian national aspirations and is hardly likely to enhance the standing of Arafat, who until recently was insisting that an independent Palestinian state was around the corner.

Reported by Hoda Tawfik in Washington, Tarek Hassan in Gaza and Nevine Khalil in Cairo



photo: Sherif Sanbol

Kind hearts and crocodiles

ANAS EL-WOGOOD has waited a long time to be produced. There have been performances in concert in the past, but this month's three night run at the Cairo Opera House is the first time that Aziz El-Shawwan's major work has been given a full scale staging.

Two casts, over three nights, alternate in portraying the strange tale of Anas El-Wogood, brave soldier and lover of Ward, the daughter of a less than understanding courtier who had rather hoped his daughter might make a better match.

Ward is banished to the Island of Philae: Anas follows, crossing a crocodile-infested Nile, and together, on the island, they encounter the goddess Isis, entering into an acquaintanceship that will have far reaching implications.

If the path of true love never runs smooth, it is seldom as humpy as this. But *que sera, sera*. Love will win through, even if it requires a little help from ancient goddesses and well-disposed sultans.

David Blake reviews Anas El-Wogood, p. 11

Scud leak brushed aside

Egypt asserts its right to develop its military capability. Nevine Khalil reports

Cairo yesterday shrugged off reports that it had acquired Scud missile material, missiles and launchers via North Korea earlier this year, insisting that such questions should be discussed within the wider framework of the arms situation in the region. Official statements further asserted that Egypt had every right to develop its defence capabilities.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, speaking at a joint press conference with visiting US Secretary of State Warren Christopher yesterday, would not confirm or deny whether the Scuds issue had been on the agenda of the hour-long talks between President Hosni Mubarak and Christopher. "We believe that such an issue should be considered in the wider framework of the arms situation in the area," said Moussa. "We should not talk about only one particular aspect, whether it's accurate or not."

In a clear reference to Israel's military

capability, including its regional monopoly on nuclear weapons, Moussa pointed out: "The situation is that the area is full of missiles and anti-missile missiles and highly sophisticated weapons." Egypt has been demanding that Israel dismantle its nuclear arsenal, estimated at 200 nuclear warheads, and sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

For its part, the US administration claims it is annoyed by the leak of a supposedly highly classified report to the press, accusing Egypt of arms deals with North Korea. State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "although we are angered by the leak, we will look into the allegations because it is a serious matter."

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said on Tuesday that Egypt must provide answers to whether it was acquiring such weapons behind Washington's back. Levy said that Israel "cannot conceive of a situa-

tion where Egypt [brings on] instability in the Middle East."

But as far as Cairo was concerned the whole hubbub was nothing but "an attempt to divert attention from the concern expressed by the Arab side towards Israel's refusal to scrap its nuclear arsenal," said Ambassador Sayed Qassem, the assistant secretary of state for international cooperation and multilateral relations, in statements to the press yesterday.

Noting that Israel was also developing a high-tech missile network with "foreign assistance", Qassem declared that: "While Egypt is committed to the peace treaty with Israel, including the security enhancement arrangements stipulated by it, its right to bolster its own defence capability is legitimate and incontestable." This right, Qassem added, was "Egypt's alone to exercise, in accordance with what it deems necessary to provide for and bolster its security and safety."

Hunt launched for base bombers

The identity of the culprits in the bombing of an American base in Saudi Arabia remains a mystery

US President Bill Clinton vowed yesterday to hunt down terrorists who attack Americans overseas, following the bombing on Tuesday night of an American housing complex in Al-Khobar, a suburb of Dhahran in eastern Saudi Arabia. A truck packed with two and a half tons of explosives detonated turning the eight-storey building into a crumbling honeycomb.

The attack killed at least 19 American airmen based at the complex, which also housed Saudis and other foreigners. The Saudi Interior Ministry put the number of wounded at 386, including 147 Saudis, 118 Bangladeshis, 109 Americans, four Egyptians and two each from Jordan, Indonesia and Philippines.

Saudi King Fahd offered his condolences in a telephone call to Clinton as world leaders called for stronger efforts to combat terrorism. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on a visit to the region at the time of the bombing, left Cairo for Dhahran to visit the wounded.

At a press conference in Cairo, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said, "We

are all against terrorism and violence and will continue to work for a more stable and safe Middle East."

For his part, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged joint Israeli-US action against terrorism and President Ezer Weizman accused Iran of being responsible for the bombing.

The attack came seven months after a car bomb blasted a US-run military training facility in Riyadh last November, killing five Americans and two Indians. No one claimed responsibility for the explosion, but a Saudi government statement stressed its resolve to punish the perpetrators and offered a 10 million riyals (\$2.7 million) reward for information leading to the attackers.

Saudi television showed pictures of bulldozers sifting through the wreckage as workers used cranes and diggers to search through the rubble for survivors. Pentagon officials said 22 US airmen were still missing. The death toll made it the worst terrorist blast involving Americans in the Middle East since the 1983 bombing of the US headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon,

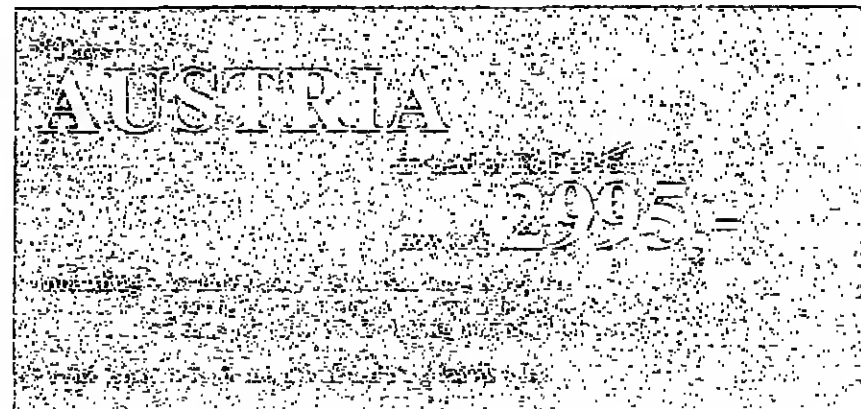
which killed 241 servicemen.

Hoda Tawfik reports from Washington that White House Spokesman Mike McCurry stressed it was a fundamental tenet of American foreign policy that the US presence in the Middle East helped to limit conflict and tension in the region.

White House officials told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Middle East was a part of the world where threats existed at all times and there were good reasons to maintain a state of alert. US Department officials said the US Embassy in Riyadh had issued a security advisory to the American community in Saudi Arabia after receiving anonymous warnings.

Shortly before the bomb exploded, a US airman in a security observation lower had reported a suspicious truck parked at a distance of 35 metres from the compound. When a Saudi officer approached, two men jumped out and drove off in a white car. US Defence Department officials said the authorities tried to evacuate two nearby apartment buildings, but the bomb went off a few minutes later before people could get out.

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Fans run riot

WITH barely a moment to relax in the midst of Egyptian Euro-fever, Cairo had its own football derby on Tuesday night. Ahli met Zamalek, amidst the usual uproar, tension and what football lovers might describe as disruption, reports Abeer Anwar.

Kickoff was at 9pm, but the excitement started long before then, as minibuses full of fans intent on finding a good place in the stands unloaded their passengers at the stadium with hours to spare.

By seven o'clock things were quiet. By nine o'clock an eerie silence pervaded the streets, interrupted only by roars from homes and cafés as the nation watched the battle of the giants.

After the match, the *Ahalawiya* (Ahli fans) poured onto the streets to celebrate their 2-0 victory. The colour red was everywhere. Groups of fans ran through the streets waving red flags. Cars and minibuses packed with fans drove around honking and waving more red flags. Some fans created their own fireworks displays, setting fire to streams of spray from insecticide cans, and lighting lengths of thin aluminium wire and waving them around. At Sphinx Square, traffic ground to a halt as Ahli fans displayed their jubilation near to the Zamalek Club. Celebrations didn't stop until around 5am.

Occasionally the celebrations took an ugly

turn. Some of the fans used animals to make fun of the losing side. A group of Ahli fans painted red stripes on a donkey to represent Zamalek colours, and ran after the animal. And in Ain Shams, two dogs were dressed in Zamalek T-shirts — one to represent Zamalek coach Farouq Gbafar, and another for its manager Ahmed Refaat.

Some disconcerted *Zamalekawiya* (Zamalek fans) expressed their anger at the match by throwing bottles and stones at the Zamalek players as they left the ground. Surrounded by armed police, the darkened Zamalek Club looked rather sad and mournful after the game.

The heavy police presence did not stop disgruntled fans from throwing stones at the club and breaking the windows of two cars parked in front of it. Five cars in Mustafa Mahmoud Square and Wadi El-Nil Street, in Mohandessin, were also damaged, along with another one next to the house of one of the Zamalek coaches in Sphinx Square, in the same area. Some so-called fans also went to the home of one of the Zamalek Club's board members, breaking the windows of his house and car.

In addition to venting their wrath at their own club, Zamalek fans also sought vengeance against Ahli. Some fans managed to reach the Ahli Club and throw stones as they waited, hoping for the Ahli players to arrive.



Photo: Ashraf Faras

The Court of Cassation shocked observers last week when it postponed its final ruling on the Abu Zeid case until next month. But what is the significance of the delay? Amira Howaldy asks the experts

Abu Zeid case still not over

The case of Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, the Cairo University professor ordered to separate from his wife on the grounds of his alleged apostasy, was due to be concluded on 24 June — the date set by the Court of Cassation for a final ruling after months of pleading and delays.

The court had been expected to cancel the case in compliance with a recent amendment to the Commercial and Civil Pleading Law, which states that only those with a direct interest are allowed to file court cases. The amendment applies also to cases currently before the court, like Abu Zeid's.

But last Monday's hearing came as a shock to Abu Zeid's supporters. In a session lasting only five minutes, the court abruptly announced that it was postponing the verdict until 5 August, to allow "for further deliberations on the case."

Disappointed defence lawyer Hassan Abdel-Wahed explained: "The law gives the Court of Cassation the right to delay the final verdict, even after it has been scheduled for a certain date, as long as the court wants to ponder longer on the issue." The court is not even obliged to hand down

a verdict in the 5 August session. "This could go on for months if the court wants it to," said Abdel-Wahed. Asked why he thought the court had delayed the verdict, he replied that it was most likely that it wanted more time to study the amendment: "This is the only possible explanation, since the court had already scheduled this date for the final verdict, but then the amendment was passed."

Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic literature at Cairo University, was separated from his wife by a court order last June on the grounds that he was an apostate and thus could not remain married to a Muslim woman. The case was brought by a group of Islamist lawyers who filed a lawsuit two years ago in an attempt to block his promotion at the university. The court based its verdict on the grounds that Abu Zeid's writings demonstrated a rejection of the fundamental tenets of Islam.

The verdict, which put Abu Zeid on Islamist militants' death lists, forced the university professor and his wife, who is also a professor, to take leaves of absence from the university and

seek temporary residence in The Netherlands. Sources close to Abu Zeid say that he is impatiently waiting, wracked with nerves, hoping for a breakthrough.

"We all know that there is no real justification for the court's delay," said Mohamed Mounib, secretary-general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), "but no one can say it's wrong either... The court has exercised its judicial right. How far this will affect the final verdict, no one knows."

The modification of Article Three of the Commercial and Civil Law, which was passed by the People's Assembly last month, has been severely criticised by Islamist lawyers, who claim that it had been specially tailored for the Abu Zeid case. Mounib does not dispute this claim. "It was very obvious that after the Abu Zeid case, which was filed under the *heshu* principle [attributed to Islamic *Shari'a*], a new law had to save the man, thus we have the amendment." However, Mounib does not believe that the court will be biased towards Abu Zeid, "because it will not make any ex-

ceptions; it is probably just trying to reach the best result in the midst of all that's going on around it." Although Mounib, along with others concerned with civil liberties, will be pleased to see an end to Abu Zeid's dilemma, he maintains that "it should not come about through a tailored law, and I think the court is conscious of this."

So far, the Abu Zeid case has passed through three legal authorities. First, the Court of Appeal last June passed a verdict ordering the couple to divorce. Abu Zeid then contested the verdict in the Court of Cassation. Before the Court of Cassation looked into the case however, it was reviewed by the Cassation Prosecutor, a legal body that issues non-binding verdicts on the cases transferred to the Court of Cassation. The Cassation prosecutor unexpectedly supported the Court of Appeal's divorce verdict, triggering even greater speculation as to how the Court of Cassation would rule. But the recent amendment to the Commercial and Civil Pleading Law changed the situation altogether — theoretically at least.

"One cannot help being pessimistic," com-

mented Hosam Eissa, a professor of international law. "We know that the court does not have much choice really, and we know that the fact that it is hesitant is very alarming, but there is still a 50-50 chance." Eissa added that the "very bad" Court of Appeals verdict "has tarnished the image of the Egyptian judiciary", thus making the job of the Court of Cassation "difficult".

Human rights activist Negad El-Borai views the situation differently. "Although the court's latest stand has caused some to question the judges' inclinations in the case, it could also mean that the court is being careful not to be put under pressure, which could explain why it keeps delaying its final verdict." If the Court of Cassation wanted to support the Court of Appeals, it could have done so a long time ago, El-Borai pointed out. "The case has come under intense legal scrutiny, including judgements from two legal bodies and the *Mufti*. The Court of Cassation has the final say, and its verdict will determine the reputation of the Egyptian judiciary," he said, adding that he hoped for a happy ending.

Omda hopefuls await selection

No longer to be chosen by balloting, thousands of candidates for the post of village head await selection by governmental committees. Jafar Halawi spoke to officials about the shift from election to appointment

Governmental committees across the country have been sifting through thousands of applications from would-be *omdas*, or village heads, to fill the vacancies in this post in 2,348 of the country's 3,544 villages. The balance of 1,196 are elected *omdas*

whose term of office has not yet expired.

Unlike their elected counterparts, the new hopefuls will have to wait upon the decision of governmental committees made up of representatives of the ministries of interior, justice and local administration, together with a judge and a senior police officer.

The committees, which are headed by local security chiefs, will be also selecting from among applicants for the post of *sheikh el-balad*, the village head's deputy. The latter post however has always been filled by appointment.

The deadline for applications for the new positions was at the end of January but the results are expected to be announced in August. Appointments will be for a five-year renewable term.

It was in 1994 that the People's Assembly amended the law governing the selection of *omdas*, abolishing their election by village ballot and establishing the new system for selection by governmental committees. The amendments also made it possible for women to fill the post for the first time.

The move by the National Democratic Party-dominated parliament was sharply criticised by the opposition which described it as an attack on democracy and a violation of the electoral principle.

Government and security officials insist, however, that the post is first and foremost a security one, and should therefore be subject to central government control. "It should be made clear that the *omda* is a public official with no legislative authority, or, more specifically, a security official attached to the administrative hierarchy of the Interior Ministry," maintained Ahmed Said El-

Sawan, legal advisor to the minister of the interior.

Pointing out that when the post of *omda* was first created in 1883, it was filled by appointment, and not by election, El-Sawan said that "as employees of the state, it is logical the *omdas* and their deputies should be appointed, rather than elected, otherwise we would elect school headmasters, managers of medical units and police officers."

Officials say that one major advantage of the appointment system is that it will curtail factional strife and vendettas in rural areas. "I don't think there will be any more feuds, because three ministries will be selecting the *omda*," predicted Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, chief of security in the Upper Egyptian Governorate of El-Minya. "The appointed *omda* will be keen to prove his efficiency and to cooperate with the governor and other concerned officials. The *omda* is the link between the government and the village."

According to El-Sawan, factional strife surrounding elections has sometimes been so serious that voting had to be cancelled — an ironic situation considering that one of the *omda*'s duties is "to maintain security in his village, settle disputes and look after the villagers' interests," El-Sawan said.

The *omda* is also responsible for applying administrative, agricultural and irrigation policies and laws. In El-Sawan's view, many of the problems faced by officials in the villages could have been prevented if there had been an *omda* who understood the real requirements of the job.

Abdel-Gawad agreed. Efficient *omdas*, he said, lessened the

load on the police force. "It is considered an affront to the *omda*'s dignity if he fails to solve a problem and it reaches the police station."

The role of *omda* could be widened further if any of the women applicants are successful. Ragaa Hassan Mahmoud, an official at the Ministry of Agriculture and a member of the ruling party, has applied to be *omda* of El-Ayyat Markaz in the Giza Governorate. She believes that as a woman *omda*, she would have an important role to play, particularly in women's areas of concern, like family planning. "A woman would feel more at ease talking to me about her worries than she would with a man," she commented.

In accordance with the 1994 amendments, applicants for the post of *omda* should be Egyptians, able to read and write, hold a minimum of five feddans of land, and have a minimum monthly income of LE300. An applicant for the post of *sheikh el-balad* should be the owner or leaseholder of agricultural land, or have a minimum monthly income of LE150. Both the *omda* and *sheikh el-balad* should be of good reputation and have no criminal record.

The amended law also allows police officers and members of the armed forces and the judiciary to apply for the posts, on the condition that they resign if they are appointed. Those who work in government or private organisations will be able to keep their jobs.

The appointed *omda* will now receive LE150 per month from the Interior Ministry, instead of the LE10 salary provided under the old law. The *sheikh el-balad*, which used to be an unpaid position, will be paid LE75.

Privatisation unconstitutional?

Forces opposed to the government's privatisation scheme are moving on several fronts. Dina Ezzat investigates

As the government moves into the fast lane with its privatisation programme, pro-public sector advocates are seeking publicity and legal backing in their efforts to stop the selling of state-owned companies and the consequent sacking of hundreds of workers.

The preparatory committee of the National Committee for the Protection of the Public Sector and the Preservation of Egypt's Wealth has initiated its activities with this aim. Over the last two weeks its 25 members, mostly economists and left-wing intellectuals, have met three times to agree on their committee's guidelines and agenda of action.

The committee's point of departure is that the privatisation scheme violates clear-cut constitutional texts that stipulate that Egypt is a socialist state and that the public sector is the pillar of its economy. This principle, the committee maintains, goes against the free market economy line which the government has adopted for the last five years.

"The government insists on going ahead with its plan, or that provided by the international funding agencies, regardless of its commitment to the spirit and texts of the constitution and against the national interest," read the committee's first communiqué.

The communiqué goes on to illustrate the hardships sustained by the poor under the privatisation plan.

"It was decided that during its initial phase, the National Committee for the Protection of the Public Sector and the Preservation of Egypt's Wealth would focus on a solidarity campaign," said economist Ahmed El-Hosari. A member of the committee, El-Hosari added that the group's work would include providing support for workers who are

adversely affected by privatisation, issuing a continuous stream of communiqués elaborating on the negative economic and societal impact of selling off the public sector, and possibly taking the government to court.

A legal battle against the government over its privatisation plans has already been launched by three opposition parties.

In April, the Nasserist, Islamist-orientated Labour and leftist Tagammu parties went to the Administrative Court in an attempt to stop the government from selling off some 240 public sector companies.

After two sessions the case is still pending. The next hearing is scheduled for 2 July, but a final verdict can only be reached when the Administrative Court refers the case to the Constitutional Court.

"Even if we don't get a court ruling to stop the selling of these companies, we would have still got the message across to the public that the sell-off is not constitutional," said Khaled Mohamed, leader of the Tagammu Party.

"It could take a long time before we get a verdict declaring the selling unconstitutional," conceded Mohamed. "We know that during this time the government might sell some of these companies, but then again if we get a court order in our favour the government would have to go back on the sales."

The plaintiffs believe that if the government wants to sell the public sector it has first to amend the constitution. However, government lawyers told the court, during the second session held over two weeks ago, that the case should be quashed because the selling of public sector companies is an act of executive sovereignty, which cannot be contested before the courts. And lawyer Gamal El-Labban said that the

plaintiffs have no direct stake [in the companies] that gives them a legal right to take court action over their privatisation.

However, this argument is unconvincing for the politicians involved. "The government should seek the permission of the people before they embark on such a massive privatisation scheme, because in fact these companies belong to the people," said Helmi Murad, deputy secretary-general of the Labour Party.

The privatisation of public sector companies is part of the economic reform programme which Egypt has agreed with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The government has over 300 companies to sell, in the fields of industry, trade and tourism.

Five years ago, the government started implementing the reform programme by adopting monetary reform measures. These included the cancelling of interest rate subsidies by the Central Bank of Egypt and the auctioning of some 100 million treasury bills at competitive interest rates.

Privatisation is the second phase of Egypt's economic reform programme. So far the government has sold in full only three companies — Pepsi Cola, Coca-Cola and Steam Boilers. Many others have been partially privatised however.

According to anti-privatisation economists and politicians, the government has never told the people the full story of the selling of these three companies. "So nobody can really assess whether the government made a good deal, or whether they were sold at a very cheap price," said prominent left-wing economist Ismail Sabri Abdallah.

Abdallah's main concern about the government's sale of the 240 com-

panies at stake is that "the government does not have a master plan for the sell-off. It is just doing it as it comes."

In his analysis, this means that the government could lose on the sales of these companies, or it could be selling them to entrepreneurs who are keen on selling the land on which the companies are built rather than upgrading the businesses.

Another concern is that the government is selling profit-making firms along with loss-making companies.

"And the selling is not done gradually," criticised Murad. "They are just going to sell them all at once." The general consensus among the opponents of the "liquidation" of the public sector is that a strong national economy would best be based on both public and private sector industries.

"We have no evidence that if sold, these companies would be better run and would bring in more money to give a push to the GDP," said Murad.

The World Bank sets three guidelines for privatisation. For one thing, the new owner should be able to enhance the productivity of the company. "This means that the new owner should not only have enough money to buy the company — which is supposedly loss-making — but also have enough capital to equip it with new and modern machinery to improve the quality of its productivity," Abdallah explained.

The other rules set out by the international financial organisation are that the buyer should pay the government in cash and that the government should observe optimum transparency. "So far the government has failed to abide by any of these rules," Abdallah said.

So who is going to buy? This is another point of contention.

Opponents of the sell-off approve of the government's attempt to encourage the middle class to invest in company shares by auctioning them on the stock market. But they reject the idea of selling off the public sector to foreigners. "If the Israelis, for instance, were to buy the chains of department stores that were once owned by Jews in Egypt they would turn them into a market for Israeli products and export Egyptian-made commodities," said Abdallah.

The future of the labour force in the newly-privatised companies is another major concern. The government has repeatedly promised to secure the future of the workers in those companies. But Abdallah is not convinced that this would be feasible. "They can promise all they want. It is a rule of thumb — you privatise a company, you introduce a new administrative system or get modern machinery, and consequently you lay off workers."

Complaints of workers who have been sacked or all but forced into an early retirement are becoming a daily feature in most of the opposition newspapers.

In court, the opposition politicians are asking the government to either amend the law or call a national referendum to gauge public opinion about the en masse privatisation.

"And this is precisely the main purpose of this lawsuit: to provoke a public reaction against the selling," said Abdallah. "It is primarily a political manoeuvre."

The plaintiffs admit that they may not get a court verdict in their favour, but they believe that strong public opinion will have as much clout over the government as the word of the Constitutional Court.

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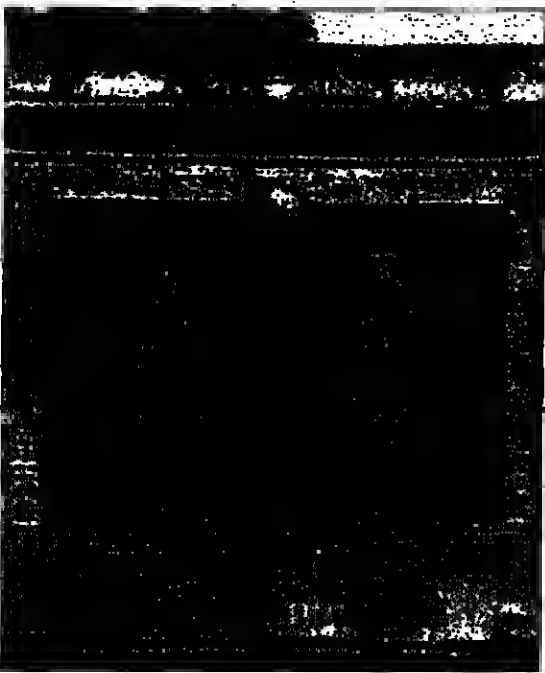
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Browsing through history

The ancient wonders of Egyptian heritage are now easily accessible through the Internet and CD-ROMS. Omayma: Abdel-Latif finds her way through Egypt's virtual museums



(L-R) An item in the Egyptian Museum, an inside view of Sultan Hassan Mosque and Sabit Katkhanda in El-Mnezz Street now enjoy a site on-line

Imagine walking through the maze of Khan El-Khalili or wandering around El-Muezz Liddin Allah El-Fatmi Street without the crowds or bothersome street vendors. With the help of virtual reality technology, cyberspace audiences can now take a leisurely trek through Old Cairo, savour the treasures in Sabit Katkhanda, climb the stairways of El-Ghuri Palace, or enjoy a visit to the three-centuries old EL-Fishawi coffee shop. Just point and click and you are there.

More than 500 historic Egyptian sites are now accessible on CD-ROM, video discs and the Internet. Museums and mosques feature in a new user-friendly programme offered by the Regional Information and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC) — the government's technology arm.

Dubbed "Cultureware", the programme uses modern technology to document the past and "allow a wider cyberspace audience to enjoy a journey back in time," explained Nahed Rif'at, the project manager.

"This multi-media system combines sound, text, graphics, animation and video. It allows users to browse through the collections of the Egyptian Museum, Dar El-Kutub, Islamic Cairo, as well as many Arab manuscripts," Rif'at told the Weekly.

Cultureware also gives users a chance to stop along the way for interpretation, analysis and in-depth exploration of data. "It is a simple way to disseminate information on Egyptian heritage," added Rif'at.

Mosques, palaces, schools, water fountains and ancient city gates are available with a simple point and click. Monuments appear with recent photos next to century-old black and white ones and historic data including translations in English and French. An accompanying glossary and thesaurus explain technical terms.

"The idea of computerised documentation of the Islamic and Coptic heritage of Old Cairo goes back to the days of the October 1992 earthquake," explained RITSEC Engineer Marawa El-Hakim. The damage caused by the earthquake alerted officials to already decaying antiquities in the areas which were hardest hit.

RITSEC is currently embarking on another ambitious project — documenting the Coptic sites. Soon the Hanging Church, and the Coptic Museum will be on-line.

This is not the first cultural project to utilise information technology for historical documentation — RITSEC has already been involved in similar projects such as the Multi-media Manuscripts Retrieval System (MMRS),

which aims to preserve the full text and images of three million Arab manuscripts. MMRS, a joint venture between Princeton University Libraries and RITSEC, allows one to browse through colourful collections with accompanying audio information. It is also available on CD-ROM and video discs.

Another important project is the Environmental Map of Archaeological Sites (EMAS). "This programme brings together updated information about archaeological sites and their environmental condition including climatological, geotechnical and restoration history," said Rif'at.

Users can access any desired site and zoom in on selected features such as walls, inscriptions or reliefs.

Documenting museums seems to comprise the bulk of RITSEC's virtual projects. The Integrated Museum Information System (IMIS) or what is known as the "virtual museum", is one of RITSEC's largest projects.

"We bring together the masterpieces and objects d'art in Egypt's museums to create our own museum containing information, both textual and visual, including provenance, material, condition and location in the museum. We call it Egypt's On-line Virtual Museum," Rif'at said.

The Egyptian Museum site on-line offers text, images, sound, video and animation of the 160,000 pieces in the museum. It also contains a retrieval system that catalogues textual and visual information.

"We have waited for this project for eight years. Finally, it has materialised," said Mohamed Saleh, head of the Egyptian Museum.

Some, however, voiced concern that the IMIS will give potential thieves ready information on where items are located. But Rif'at dismisses such danger, pointing out up-to-date security measures that would deter robbers.

Tourism expert Elhami El-Zayyat said, "Even those who cannot make it to Egypt will still have a chance to get a taste of the Egyptian civilization and the objects in the Egyptian Museum, Dar El-Kutub and El-Muezz Street."

Tohfa Handousa, professor of Egyptology at Cairo University's Faculty of Archaeology said, "It is the most innovative technology for culture preservation I have seen in Egypt. It is a platform that makes information about the cultural heritage available to Egyptian and international scholars alike."

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Arab press on-line

A pan-Arab company is launching the first ever electronic index of Arabic newspapers and magazines, writes Amira Howeldy

Two hundred young researchers, technicians and computer experts, working around the clock for two years in a basement on the outskirts of Nasr City, have finally finished setting up a system to provide valuable information on Arab affairs at the touch of a button.

Over one million newspaper and magazine articles so far have been selected and catalogued — including information on article subject, length and a brief summary of the text — by a team of professional indexers, and put on the computers of the Infoware Technologies Company. Subscribers can now access the information in print form, on CD-ROMs, and, in the near future, on-line on the Internet. The aim, say the company's managers, is to preserve today's Arab news and commentary as tomorrow's history.

This first-of-its-kind information service daily indexes over 300 Arabic-language newspapers and magazines, from sources including the London-based *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Sharq*, *Al-Dustour*, Egypt's *Al-Ahram* and post-graduate theses from Egyptian and Saudi universities. The system covers domestic and foreign news, commentaries, features, interviews, letters, business, the urban environment, technology, education, law, science, sports and special reports.

The project is the brainchild of Mohamed Elewa, currently the company's regional manager. Shocked by the fact that newspapers in the Arab world "end up as a tablecloth at the end of each day", when, in his view, "today's newspapers are tomorrow's archives", Elewa decided to establish an information system that could compete with computerised libraries in the developed countries. The Arab heritage, he said, deserved professional advanced electronic documentation, retrievable in a matter of seconds.

While working for a Saudi newspaper, Elewa dropped a smaller-scale project along the same lines, and got together with a Saudi publisher and reporter to found the company five years ago in Saudi Arabia. Two years ago they opened the Cairo office, which has recently begun to provide its service to the public.

"We have been working on a 24-hour basis for the past two years in Egypt with the hope of achieving our aim of establishing the first electronic index in the Arab world, and we're almost there," said Elewa.

While the press index constitutes 90 per cent of its data, Infoware Technologies also indexes books. Information on both indexes is available on CD-ROM. The company produces a monthly CD-ROM-based publication called *Pan-Arab Journals Memory*, with full bibliographic details and abstracts of more than 35 Arabic newspapers and 100 Arabic magazines published throughout the world. Each edition contains indexing with abstracts of around 60,000 articles. A user can also access the full text image, an exact reproduction of the printed page of each article.

Perhaps the project's main accomplishment so far is the numerous Arabic-language computer programmes created by the company's technicians. Designed to deal with hundreds of sub-titles and categories, the programmes are user-friendly, easily accessible by those without computer experience. In a month's time, the company will open a new office in Heliopolis, called the Information Cafeteria, which will offer access to Infoware's data, the Internet and the major English-language newspapers and magazines — computer-indexed of course.

While Elewa is optimistic about the project's prospects for success, he acknowledges that there are problems in marketing such an index in Egypt — mainly the low level of computer literacy, and the 64 per cent rate of general illiteracy. So far the company has spent over LE6 million on the project, and is offering an initial temporary service at a price which merely covers its costs. "We are offering our services for very little money at the beginning until we gain the confidence of the Egyptian market," explained Elewa. "We are beginning from point zero in this field. We have to both educate the market and create customers. It's a very slow process."

How much will the service eventually cost the consumer? Elewa does not have a final price list in mind. While the company is beginning with an initial low-price offer for the Egyptian market, it is also targeting Arab, Saudi and international markets "and any person or institution interested in our work... We know they will become addicted to it. Who could say no to such a service?" Elewa asks. Whether or not his hopes are fulfilled, Elewa's project marks an unprecedented and revolutionary entry of the private sector into the information business in the Arab world.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

Edition no. 6,575 of 3 November 1899 marks a major milestone in the history of *Al-Ahram*. With this issue the newspaper began publishing in Cairo after being based in Alexandria for nearly a quarter of a century (23 years and three months to be exact).

It had been a period rife with other historical landmarks that chronicle the evolution of the newspaper. Three times the newspaper had almost suffered an early death. Under Khedive Ismail, while it was still only a weekly, its editions of 1 and 8 May 1879 were suspended for reasons of "involvement in politics". This violated the terms under which Selim Tagla, one of its co-founders, was able to obtain a licence. Several years later, after it had become a daily, it suspended publication from 5 June to 1 August 1882, due to the events of the Orabi Revolution and the antagonism that had arisen between it and the rebels. On the last occasion, the newspaper had antagonised the British colonial authorities causing it to be suspended from publication for a little over a month, from 20 August to 22 September 1884.

Edition no. 1,003 also marks an important milestone. It was with this issue, the first of 1881, that *Al-Ahram* made the transition from a weekly to a daily. Because the two milestones are interrelated, we will pause to recapitulate the events that led up to it.

Al-Ahram's first edition appeared on 5 August 1876. Within two months it began to issue a daily supplement called the *Sada Al-Ahram* (*Al-Ahram Echo*). The supplement, which changed its name to *Al-Waqf* (Time) after the newspaper's first debacle under Ismail in 1879, continued to be published alongside the weekly *Al-Ahram* until 3 January 1881 when *Al-Ahram* made its transition to a daily. From this point on there was no longer a need for a supplement, that is until the newspaper moved to Cairo.

It is interesting to note that the move from Alexandria to Cairo received so little attention in the newspaper. In his major work *Al-Ahram: the History of Egypt in 75 Years* (1951), the late professor of journalism Ibrahim Abuhadad had so little information at his disposal that he could only devote little more than a page in his monumental study to this major turning point in the life of the newspaper. In fact, he could only offer two direct quotes from the newspaper regarding its move.

If we are to determine the motives behind this transition, we will have to adopt a more deductive approach. Indeed, reading between the lines of the previous issue reveals that Bishara Tagla's decision to move to Cairo was not as sudden as it appeared.

One element that strikes one immediately is that many of Bishara Tagla's com-

mentaries were dispatched from Cairo. Taking up the bulk of the second page was a section called "The Capital", perhaps the most important section in the newspaper's four pages. "The Capital" not only featured reports on events there, but commentaries and editorials too. The newspaper had a permanent correspondent stationed in Cairo among whose responsibilities it was to edit that page. Yet, suddenly, in 1899, the contemporary reader must have noted that the byline changed from "our correspondent reports" to "our editor-in-chief reports". It appears that Bishara Tagla had already taken up at least semi-permanent residence in Cairo. Although we have no proof that Tagla indeed moved to Cairo that year, it is difficult to believe that, given the frequency of his reports from the capital, he remained essentially a commuter from Alexandria.

During the same period, the space allocated to news from Alexandria dwindled. News from Alexandria generally appeared on the front page or in one of the inside pages under the heading "Domestic Incidents". These columns would also feature news from Istanbul as well as arrival and departure times of passenger ships.

Al-Ahram's 15 October 1899 edition illustrates this change in orientation. It contained only three short articles pertaining to Alexandria. Indeed, "articles" is perhaps too generous a word for they were closer to bulletins. The first was the weather bulletin; describing the dark, overcast skies that day. The second published a verdict pronounced by the Court of Delinquency in Mantisse. The third announced that "within the past 24 hours no one has been reported as afflicted by the plague".

Meanwhile, the Cairo page of that issue, edited by Bishara Tagla, was full of news. The editor-in-chief himself wrote an editorial commenting on a controversial foreign affairs issue at the time: the entrance of Germany as a nascent colonial power in Africa to rival the age-old enemies Great Britain and France.

The choice must have presented itself vividly to Bishara Tagla. Either the newspaper could remain in the city of its birth and try to fight off the stigma of being merely a local tabloid or it could take the plunge, shift its headquarters to the capital and rival the other major newspapers of the times: *Al-Mu'ayyid* and *Al-Muqattam*, both in publication for over a decade, and *Al-Liwa*. Owned and operated by the nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel, with the backing of the khedive, this newspaper would appear two months after *Al-Ahram* made its move to Cairo.

Al-Ahram in Cairo and Alexandria" was the title of the article appearing in the 24 October edition in which *Al-*

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After being based for nearly a quarter of a century in Alexandria, *Al-Ahram* started up in Cairo on 3 November 1899. In this instalment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq recounts the details of the demise of the Alexandria edition of the newspaper



Bishara Tagla

Ahram's readers learned for the first time of Tagla's decision to transfer the newspaper's headquarters to Cairo. Tagla reminded his readers of *Al-Ahram's* "lengthy service to the revival of the Egyptian nation". For over a quarter of a century the newspaper "has addressed the people, awakened their consciences and alerted them to what has befallen Egypt. We thank God that its message has found attentive ears." It appears as though Tagla was eager to lessen the blow to his Alexandrian readership. He does not mention outright that the headquarters and administration would move to Cairo. Rather he says that the newspaper will "commence publication of two editions simultaneously, one of its current size in Cairo and a slightly smaller one in Alexandria". Yet the discerning reader would be able to discover his true intentions in the remainder of the article.

The Cairo edition, he said, "will retain the current economic, commercial and literary content of the newspaper, with the same subscription fees and conditions. Indeed, we anticipate considerable improvement and a greater abundance of news, because, in the capital, we will be closer to the major events and sources of news. At the same time, it will contain abundant commercial news, because we have installed a special telegraph that will operate day and night to keep us abreast of all the activity in the port and the Alexandria stock exchange." As for the Alexandria edition, he says, it will be smaller, "however, it will be no less meagre and informative."

The newspaper offered other indicators to those who began to suspect the truth. In

the same article it announced, "We have selected premises for the administration and the press in El-Manasb Street near Ismailiya Square and have fitted it out with all the necessary equipment to publish books, including paper of all types."

In another short item, the newspaper apologised to its readers that "during the short process of moving the printing equipment we will continue to publish the Alexandria edition in its current size after which it will appear in its new format". A contemporary observer records that "it was not long before I noticed (in *Al-Ahram's* new Cairo offices) 12 printing presses of assorted sizes arranged in an orderly fashion in that vast hall. All of them are powered by kerosene and can produce the finest and most detailed reproduction. The machines are operated by over 60 young employees with a secure livelihood before them."

The disparity between the newspapers was becoming ever more obvious. The Cairo offices were now better equipped and the Cairo edition promised to be more comprehensive. The discrepancy would reflect itself in the prices. The price of the Cairo edition would be five millimes as opposed to three millimes for the Alexandrian edition. A yearly subscription to the Alexandrian edition would cost one pound and "only 50 piastres for those who subscribe to the main edition, a bargain price that simply covers the costs of paper and postage."

Should readers have wondered why Tagla insisted on continuing to publish the newspaper in Alexandria at all, he provided the answer in the conclusion to his article. His decision was "not due alone to

the importance of Alexandria as a commercial centre, but in recognition of our indebtedness to this port city which provided the cradle in which *Al-Ahram* came into being."

While such moving sentiments may have been crucial to Tagla's decision to keep an Alexandrian *Al-Ahram* in print, they would not rule for long. It would not be long before the language of financial interests would exercise a more powerful sway. That the Alexandrian edition awaited a more dire fate was confirmed by its new name: "The Echo". Reconstituted from *Al-Ahram's* less stable past, it carried all the concomitant stigma of a subsidiary supplement.

Yet Tagla's article would pack one more surprise. *Al-Ahram* he announced, also plans to start publication of a French-language newspaper, "Les Pyramides" will acquaint the people of Europe with how we really live, feel and think, in the hope that this will gain broader sympathy and support for our demands."

Contemporary readers must have raised their eyebrows at Tagla's ambitions. Not only would *Al-Ahram* have to contend with the competition of other established Arabic newspapers in the capital, he wanted its name to take its place alongside the other many foreign-language newspapers in the country, notably the *Egyptian Gazette* and *Le Phare d'Alexandrie*. It certainly must have struck them that *Al-Ahram* was about to set a precedent by publishing the first Arabic-language press to publish a foreign-language newspaper.

There was little left to do but pack and climb aboard the train to Cairo. On 31 October 1899 *Al-Ahram* bade farewell to the city that nurtured it into existence. Although Tagla had promised his readers that the first Cairo edition would appear the following day, it did not appear until three days later. This edition, dated 3 November, contained two articles treating the progress of the paper after its move, the first by Tagla and the second by *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Alexandria.

Tagla's article provides us with no further insight into the reason for the move. Rather, in what was closer to a public relations gesture, he announced, "We present this first issue of the newspaper published in the capital to our esteemed readers with our sincere confidence that they will find it replete with accurate news and information."

The task of Khalil Effendi El-Gawish, the Alexandria correspondent, was more difficult. Indeed, he had to be more than an ordinary correspondent because he had to take the place of the entire team that had moved to Cairo. He thus felt he had to explain his policy. As the assistant editor to the *Al-Ahram Echo*, he vowed "neither to be given in ingratulating flattery nor

to contemptuous censorship so as not to be like the blind hen that pecks indiscriminately at the wheat and chaff. Moderation is the best policy for the writer."

Having worked as *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Cairo previously, he was in a position to draw a comparison. In almost mocking tones he writes, "The whistles of the steamers are so loud they deafen one's ears. You can make the rounds of all the government departments — the governor's office, the police commissioner's office, the customs, the municipal council, the naval health department — and all you come up with at the end of the day is that so-and-so has travelled or arrived, that so-and-so was arrested and so-and-so was beaten up, that cotton bales fell on a worker and that it has been decided to pave such-and-such a street with asphalt. How far this is removed from the news one hears in Cairo!"

No wonder *Al-Ahram* transferred its headquarters. Little wonder too that El-Gawish lasted less than two months in Alexandria. On 26 December we read of his transfer back to Cairo. "Khalil Effendi El-Gawish, formerly *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Alexandria, has been appointed assistant editor-in-chief to *Al-Ahram's* offices in Cairo. His position in Alexandria will be assumed by Farah Effendi Anton."

El-Gawish's frustrations and transfer sounded an early death knell for *Al-Ahram's Echo*. The supplement would scarcely last more than a year, in spite of the Cairo *Al-Ahram's* attempts to promote it. Not only was it offered at reduced rates to regular *Al-Ahram* subscribers, Tagla himself would contribute regularly and the Cairo *Al-Ahram* would frequently reproduce articles from its Alexandrian supplement, giving it a prominent byline. In spite of these fortifying injections, distribution figures for the *Echo* plummeted. It was not long before Tagla allocated space in the Cairo *Al-Ahram* in the commercial news that had been destined for the *Echo*, which quietly expired without ceremony.

Although Tagla had promised his readers that the first edition of *Les Pyramides* would appear on 1 November, it did not make its appearance until 5 January 1900. With the release of its French-language newspaper, *Al-Ahram* established a custom that it revived with the publication of *Al-Ahram Weekly* and *Hebdo*.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



A vision of peace

Arab leaders closed ranks and contained differences to present their case for a final settlement this week. **Samia Nkrumah** reviews the Cairo Arab Summit



Egyptian President Mubarak, right, leans to speak to Jordan's King Hussein, left, at the summit's closing session (photo: AP)

Shaky start on fragile foundations

Netanyahu's fragile coalition is caught between the reality of Palestinian autonomous areas and hawkish pre-election promises. **Graham Usher** in Jerusalem probes the new Israeli government's fault lines

The new Israeli government's responses on 23 June to the Cairo Arab Summit were predictably chilly. "The peace process can't be made hostage to any prior conditions," ran a prepared statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office. Netanyahu was angered by the summit's final communiqué which warned that the Arab states would "reconsider steps taken in the context of the peace process" should Israel renege on commitments made at the Madrid conference and in the Oslo Accords.

Netanyahu's discomfort is understandable. In the three weeks since he and his coalition partners assumed office, the new Israeli government has discovered that while it may not like the terms of Israel's several peace processes — which are predicated on the formula of "land for peace" — it can do little to reverse them. The summit's insistence on the regional consensus behind these terms was a message reinforced by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher during his visit to Jerusalem on 25 June.

While Christopher reaffirmed the US' "unshakable commitment to Israel's well-being and security," he also made it clear that he expected the Israeli government to "preserve and implement agreements reached with the Palestinians". Simply put, this means the US wants negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to resume as quickly as possible and "a decision" taken on the issue of Israel's stalled redeployment in Hebron. Netanyahu's official line is that both will occur once Israel's "security needs are met".

But other ministers of his are less restrained. On 24 June, Israel's Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani stated that Israel would honour agreements and "withdraw from Hebron", though with certain modifications. These, according to Israeli security officials, are a deal under which the Israeli army would withdraw from 85 per cent of the city while keeping "overriding responsibility" for security matters. Under these conditions, Israel would allow 400 Palestinian police to take responsibility for public order duties, similar to the set-up that exists in the West Bank's 450 Palestinian villages — but not in Gaza and six West Bank cities, where the PNA enjoys absolute responsibility for security.

Neither Palestinian President Yasser Arafat nor the PNA has yet made any response. But past practice suggests that Arafat will accept, since getting the PNA's civic institutions and security forces inside Hebron will create a de facto reality that, once established, will be impossible for Israel to reverse. The 400 or so Jewish settlers who live in the heart of Hebron are unlikely to be enthusiastic about Likud's apparent climb-down. But they have so far mounted minimal opposition to it, suggesting that they, too, understand that Oslo creates its own facts on the ground.

Yet if Netanyahu and most of his ministers can live with a compromise on Hebron, other matters are already threatening to tear their fragile coalition apart. On 21 June, Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy caused a minor storm by stating that Syria and Israel could "meet half-way" on an agreement on the Golan Heights, involving territorial concessions "at a certain stage and if we achieve peace". Coming less than a week after the government's guidelines affirmed Israel's "sovereignty over the Golan Heights" in any "arrangement with Syria", Levy's comments provoked outrage among the 13,000 Jewish settlers on the Golan and irritation from his prime minister. "Only statements by the prime minister reflect Israeli policy on these political issues," retorted a Netanyahu spokesman.

The spat with Levy shows up Netanyahu's central problem. He remains caught between the maximalism of his own pre-election promises and the reality Oslo has created regionally, and especially in the Occupied Territories. The result is that the Israeli prime minister has no policy other than that made up ad hoc by wayward ministers, which — as with Levy — is then denied by other ministerial statements. It is this dangerous instability "at the heart of the new Israeli administration that triggered the Arabs getting together in Cairo and brought Christopher once more to Jerusalem."

Nowhere is the vacuum felt more acutely than in Netanyahu's so far non-committal stance vis-à-vis the vast security network, composed of Israeli and PNA security forces that now exists in the West Bank and Gaza. Should the new Likud government be true to its own guidelines — which state that the Israeli army will "act against the threat of terrorism everywhere" including inside Gaza and the West Bank's six autonomous areas — then the scene is set for a showdown between Israel and the PNA. It is a scenario that has set alarm bells ringing, and not just among the Arabs.

In an article published in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 12 June, military correspondent Ze'ev Schiff reported on a meeting between Netanyahu and Israel's General Security Service (GSS) head, Ami Ayalon. At it, Ayalon is reported to have warned Israel's prime minister not to do anything that would "jeopardise the intelligence cooperation" built up between the GSS and the PNA's intelligence forces, asserting that Israel's recent successes against Hamas and Islamic Jihad could not have occurred without the PNA's involvement and Arafat's personal authorisation. It is a view shared by the Israeli army's chief-of-staff, Amnon Shahak, and by important figures in the US State Department.

But not yet by Likud. For Netanyahu's chief security advisor, Dore Gold, PNA-Israeli security cooperation is "a recent phenomenon" brought on by international pressure after the suicide attacks in Israel earlier this year. Once the heat is off, he says, Arafat "need not bother with security matters".

But sources close to the PLO leader say Gold is mistaken. Arafat's ruthless crackdown against the Islamists over the last three months is less a tactic than a strategic decision, but one which expects in return Israel's ongoing commitment to the Oslo formula — initially on Hebron, then on further territorial transfers in the PNA in the West Bank and finally over real progress in the final-status negotiations.

The fear, aired by Israel's security establishment and the US, is that if Netanyahu reneges on Oslo's political commitments, Arafat and the PNA may renege on its "security undertakings". The ground would then be fertile for a renewed Intifada, but with one difference. When Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza kicked off their uprising against the occupation in 1987, they did so with nothing in their hands except stones. Today, they have heavy weapons, a nascent state authority and a 40,000-strong armed police force. These, still, are not enough to pose an existential threat to the state of Israel. But they are powers enough to bring down an Israeli government, especially one as internally fragile as Netanyahu's.

As the curtain fell on the Cairo Arab Summit of 21-23 June, the message from the 21 Arab states crystallised. There were no warnings or threats, but "requests" and "calls". In addition, Arabs went to great lengths to demonstrate that they were not the ones responsible for the setback to the peace process.

The moderate tone was set at the outset with the opening words of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who chaired the summit. "We are not warmongers," he said. "We insist on pursuing the road to peace." The speech was considered an official document of the summit's conference by the Arab leaders in attendance — among them 14 heads of state.

The message to Israel and the world at large, as reflected in the final communiqué, contained no "preconditions", contrary to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's interpretation. It was simply a reminder of broken promises made five years ago.

Presumably, Netanyahu saw "preconditions" in the clauses stating: "If Israel deviates from the bases or principles of the peace process, or retreats from its commitments, promises and agreements... or procrastinates in implementing them, this will lead to a setback with all the ramifications involved... and compel the Arab states to reconsider steps taken in the context of the peace process vis-à-vis Israel."

This aptly describes the situation as it is today. The peace process has already received numerous setbacks due to Israeli procrastination. The alleged

"preconditions" are requests to fulfil the land-for-peace formula, which is the very basis of the 1991 Madrid peace conference, agreed upon by all parties, including Israel. Moreover, this formula was backed by international guarantees from the UN, and the co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and Russia. The Madrid understandings, together with UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425, calling for Israeli withdrawal from areas including the Golan, South Lebanon and East Jerusalem, were violated by Israel's former Labour government.

Prior to the summit, most Arab states which have proceeded with commercial and diplomatic relations with Israel indicated that henceforth any progress along these lines would be linked to progress along peace tracks.

Tunisian President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali said in his speech that Tunisia has been careful to link normalising relations with Israel to progress in the peace process and remains committed to doing so. While the summit was in progress, the Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association (MEMTTA), born out of the Casablanca and Amman economic summits in 1994 and 1995 respectively, postponed its meeting this month in Tunis to September "because of uncertainties over the Arab-Israeli peace process". MEMTTA's headquarters are in Tunis, and Israel is one of its founding members.

Nevertheless, no criticism was directed at those who chose to

see things differently. Jordan, whose monarch was the only Arab head of state to meet Netanyahu before his election victory, is sticking to its agenda. One day after the summit, Israel's national airline, ELAL, landed on Jordanian soil for the first time, in line with the 1994 peace agreement between the two countries. Last week US military manoeuvres were taking place in Jordan.

Besides "requests", the other main theme dominating the summit was Arab concern for national security. Some may choose to see the mention of Turkey and Iran in the communiqué as a diplomatic victory for particular Arab states. However, these states received Arab backing because it was felt that their security was threatened by non-Arab states.

The United Arab Emirates was supported in its territorial dispute with Iran over the islands of Tanab and Abu Moussa in the Strait of Hormuz. Fears were also expressed that Israel aided Eritrea in seizing the Greater Haniab Islands in the Red Sea from Yemen last year.

Arab leaders reiterated their call for a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, "foremost among which are nuclear weapons, encompassing all states in the region including Israel."

Arab "concern at the Israeli-Turkish military pact" emerged not just because such a pact puts Turkey's neighbour, Syria, under pressure by giving Israel access to Turkish air space and ports. But the ramifications of such an agreement also threaten to tip the balance of power in

the Middle East further away from the Arabs. Turkey and Israel have become military allies at a time when the former's relations with Syria are at an all-time low.

By throwing their weight behind Syria, Arabs are saying that they do not wish to see Syria become an Arab state under siege like Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Sudan and the Palestinian self-rule territories. Syrian soil was the scene of explosions last week. Turkey, which accuses Syria of aiding the Kurdish Workers Party, was implicated.

Arab security concerns prompted Arab leaders to emphasise "the need to uphold the unity of Iraq and oppose any policy or measure that affects its territorial integrity". But the Iraqi government was deemed responsible for its people's suffering. As if on cue, Iraq allowed a UN team to destroy its biological weapons plant at Al-Hakam, 37 miles southeast of Baghdad, on Sunday. But the UN team remains dissatisfied with what it termed minor concessions from Iraq.

Arab leaders expressed "deep concern at the human and material damages inflicted on the Libyan Arab people through the arbitrary measures imposed on them". They also backed the Arab League's call for the US, France and Britain to accept a trial for the suspects of the Pan-Am bombing in The Hague, with Scottish judges and according to Scottish law.

Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi was buoyed by his violation of the air embargo on Libya as he arrived in a Libyan Boeing 727 plane. Now the US

demands an explanation from Egypt and Libya over the violation. Gaddafi's tongue-in-cheek advice to the 30,000 Palestinians threatened with expulsion from Libya to march with an olive branch in their hands to the West Bank summed up their plight. Summit leaders called for the settlement of "the Palestinian refugee problem based on the right to return". America is at loggerheads with the European Union over the latter's trade links with Libya, Iran and Cuba. The EU, China and Russia lent their diplomatic support to the pan-Arab summit.

The Cairo International Conference Centre in Nasr City, and the Meridien and Sonesta hotels in Heliopolis, where the diplomats were lodged, were engulfed in tight security. Famous for their wide roads and their distance from the bustle and bustle of central Cairo, both districts are perfect spots for security checks. Taxi drivers, scared off by the sight of hundreds of white-clad policemen, would refuse to stop within 100 metres of the Meridien.

Terrorism featured on the agenda of the summit, but it was tackled from a different angle from that of the March Sharm El-Sheikh Peacekeepers Summit. While leaders "condemned all forms of terrorism", they deplored "all attempts to label legitimate national resistance as terrorism", an obvious reference to Hizbullah's war against the Israeli presence in South Lebanon.

So moderation was the order of the day at the three-day summit. The line proved effective when dealing with inter-Arab

differences. Disagreements spanning years could not be resolved in three days, but they were given a chance to be aired. Fuller reconciliation hangs on promises of annual pan-Arab summits and additional mini-summits. It was reported that a meeting between Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Damascus is imminent.

The numerous bilateral meetings on the fringes of the summit were simply a first step towards clearing the air between clashing states. Diplomats gave no details of bilateral meetings beyond one-line statements, with the ubiquitous adjectives "positive" and "satisfactory" inserted for good measure. Individual country press chiefs, always polite but unhelpful, varied their tactics from stalling to forthright rejection. Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Amr Moussa was entrusted with the job of talking to the media after each closing session. Foreign ministers met to finalise drafts before each closing session and prior to private meetings to minimise friction. No one wanted a repeat of the public wrangle which took place at the August 1990.

Amnosity was painstakingly hidden from the eyes and ears of the media so as not to overshadow Arab consensus on the essentials of a final settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. What politician would dare label this consensus as nothing more than a dream? If he did, he would be admitting that Madrid was a fantasy and its guarantors phantoms on an imaginary stage of a by-gone era.

Turkey put on the spot

Despite Arab criticism of the military pact between Turkey and Israel, the Arab summit communiqué is described by Turkish diplomats as rather moderate, reports **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

In the communiqué issued at the Cairo Arab Summit on Sunday, Arab leaders expressed their hope "for the continuance of traditional Turkish-Arab relations and common interests". In that context, they expressed concern over the Israeli-Turkish military agreement, and called upon Turkey to reconsider the pact, "to prevent any negative bearing on the security of Arab states."

Turkish diplomatic sources described the communiqué as "sporting a moderate language which is not confrontational". The moderate tone, said one source, "is reflected in the paragraph concerning Turkey. It [the communiqué] is not trying to escalate things."

But a Turkish Foreign Ministry official, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Cairo on Monday, said that it would be "hard to implement" a reconsideration of its military pact with Israel. "The operational side of the communiqué is beyond what Turkey is practically capable of doing," said the official, adding that there is also "no need" to reconsider it.

"This agreement was not signed in a hasty manner. We believe that it does not contain any item that could jeopardise the interests or security of neighbouring Arab countries," said the Turkish official.

Turkish media sources, however, expressed their dismay over the statement which "puts Turkey on equal footing with Israel."

"Though it is not as harsh as we expected it to be, the mere mention of Turkey in a communiqué issued by a pan-Arab summit indicates that the aim of the summit was a message to non-Arab coun-

tries that play an enemy role," Ismail Kapan, editor-in-chief of the Istanbul-based *Turkiye* daily newspaper, told the *Weekly*.

The Turkish foreign ministry official disclosed that a formal letter was sent by the Turkish foreign minister to his Egyptian counterpart urging Egypt not to include the water dispute between Syria and Turkey in the summit's agenda.

"The letter explained the Turkish position on the water issue which was previously discussed in an Arab League meeting. But Arab countries at the time took a decision, we believe, to form an Arab bloc against Turkey, and it was instigated by Syria," said the official.

According to the same source, the Turkish foreign minister urged Arab countries not to be manipulated by Syria during the summit as this would lead to a deterioration in Turkish-Arab relations.

Turkey, according to the Foreign Ministry official, is willing to establish new channels of dialogue with both Egyptian and Arab officials to clear up misunderstandings about the military pact.

"If a threat was not coming from Kurdish terrorists and if Syria did not sign a similar agreement with Greece, Turkey would have found less justification to sign such an agreement with Israel, because an agreement like that, under different circumstances, could have topped any Turkish government," said the source.

The February agreement between Turkey and Israel, the text of which was not disclosed, calls for cooperation in military training, in the defense industry and in the exchange of information. It allows Is-

raeli aircraft to use Turkish bases and Israeli ships to use Turkish ports.

Turkish officials repeatedly stressed in their public statements that the agreement was not directed against the interests or the security of neighbouring Arab countries.

This is not a strategic pact but rather a training agreement. Similar agreements were signed with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Jordan. This type of agreement has the same pattern," said Bulent Kenc, foreign news editor of the Istanbul-based *Zaman* newspaper.

Asked by the *Weekly* whether the agreement could develop into a larger alliance which includes Turkey and Israel in addition to other parties, the Turkish ambassador to Cairo dismissed the question, saying that "Turkey is not after the creation of a new grouping in the region." He added, however, that "if Syria does not stop harbouring terrorism against Turkey, Turkey may need to sign another agreement with Israel to crack down on terrorism. It is a question of survival for Turkey, and if survival requires us to do so, we may not only cooperate with Israel but with any country in the world," said the ambassador.

Striking a more optimistic note, the ambassador revealed that a fresh round of talks with Syria is likely to take place. "We should work on opening new channels between the two countries instead of going through a third party," he said.

From its suspected involvement in Bahraini unrest to being warned against threatening regional stability, Iran was mildly, but in effect, chastised by summit leaders, reports **Sherine Bahaa**

Message to Tehran

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Though Arab leaders avoided directly accusing Iran of instigating the unrest among Bahraini's Shi'ite Muslim majority in their carefully worded summit communiqué, they called on Iran to respect Bahraini sovereignty, in the context of mutual respect and good neighbourliness, and condemned foreign interference in the troubled Gulf state.

According to Fahmi Howaidi, an Islamist political analyst and expert on Iran, the Gulf states and Jordan were in agreement on raising the issue of terrorism and of implicating Iran. Jordan's prime minister toured the Gulf a few days before the summit. All six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) attended the summit, though only Bahrain was represented at the level of head-of-state.

The Bahraini emir raised the case of his troubled country at the summit and met separately with both President Hosni Mubarak and Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. The three leaders held a trilateral meeting on the summit's sidelines, which no doubt dealt with the Bahraini-Iran crisis. Syria maintains strong friendship and cooperation ties with the Islamic republic.

For their part, the Iranians objected to being regarded in the communiqué as a threat to regional states, and to being coupled with Turkey, which was also the object of criticism

from the Israeli-Turkish military pact. In Iran's view, the military deal Turkey struck with Israel constitutes a real threat to regional security. Iran, on the other hand, believes that its disputes with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates do not interfere with stability in the Middle East.

But some consider the tone of the communiqué as "moderate". Walid Abdel-Nasser, an Egyptian expert on Iranian affairs, had expected the summit to adopt a tougher position, especially in the light of Bahrain's recent accusations that Iran had been behind a plot to overthrow the government there. Several factors accounted for the summit's restrained tone on Iran, according to Abdel-Nasser, foremost among them is the advent to power in Israel of an extreme right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu. "There had to be a different tone in the message sent to Israel and that directed to Iran," said Abdel-Nasser, adding that Syria also "played a crucial role in watering down the Arab stance towards Iran."

For its part, Iran hailed the Arab summit as a "positive step" and denied any link to the strife in Bahrain. In a show of goodwill, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Iran "was ready for active participation in the establishment of stability and security in the region as well as in countering the aggressive plans of the [Israeli] occupiers."

The Iranian foreign minister declared that Iran was ready to resolve problems with neighbouring Gulf countries but emphasised that a new order in the Gulf region must be predicated on the expulsion of foreign military troops. The Iranian foreign minister was referring to the American and other Western military troops and bases still present in the Gulf region, more than five years after a massive US-led military alliance ousted Iraq from Kuwait.

After the 1991 Gulf War, Iran made it a priority to negotiate a new regional order with GCC member states. Iran supported the GCC notions of "self-reliance" and "Gulfisation" and thought that such a notion might lead to the reduction of the burden of excessive reliance on the US, enhance Iran's regional role and establish a regional balance of power among various parties in the Gulf. But the US emerged as the sole guarantor of security for its GCC allies.

"The issue is much more than a Bahraini-Iranian dispute or an Iranian-Emirate debate over three islands," commented Howaidi, referring to Iran's occupation of three Gulf islands claimed by the United Arab Emirates. "Without this sense of a terrible threat to their security, Gulf countries would not feel the need for a foreign military presence in their land and territorial waters."

Respect for the League

Arab states affirmed the role of the Arab League as the channel for joint Arab action, reports **Rasha Saad**

In their final communiqué Arab leaders attending the Cairo summit emphasised their commitment to the Arab League's charter and resolutions as well as their determination to strengthen and activate the organisation's role.

The Cairo summit was called by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. However, the summit was brought about in part through the efforts of the League's Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid, who called for Arab reconciliation in March of 1993.

The final communiqué indicated Arab leaders' respect for the peaceful settlement of bilateral disputes in line with the Arab League's charter.

Arab leaders recommended that the Arab League Council, together with the Economic and Social Council of the League, develop and implement integrated economic and social strategies to promote the economic interests of Arab states.

Egyptian and Arab intellectuals hailed the initiative and expressed hope that the role of the Arab League will be reactivated.

According to Nassif Hitti, deputy secretary-general of the Arab League, the positive atmosphere which the summit created will give the League a push forward.

"The League suffered from the Arab divisions in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. As any regional institution, it is a reflection of existing inter-Arab disputes," he explained.

The same idea was reflected by Ahmed Youssef, professor of political science at Cairo University. "When the Arabs enjoyed good relations, the League was able to halt the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait in 1961 without shedding a drop of blood."

Gamil Matar, head of the Arab Centre for Developmental and Economic Studies and a former top Arab League official, said that the more convening of an Arab summit is beneficial to the League. He stressed the importance of a collective Arab will to implement the summit's recommendations and added that annual summits will have a positive impact on both the League and Arab states.

Haider Ibrahim, head of the Sudanese Research Centre, said that the League should be regarded as a means for unified Arab action. "Even if the League experiences moments of weakness, all Arabs should work for its survival and development."

Ahmed Sidki Al-Dejani, a Palestinian intellectual, pointed out that a revival of the role of the League will boost the Palestinian cause.

"When the Arab world was weak, the PLO became vulnerable to Israeli pressure. Today this can be changed. The League should give special attention to the Palestinian issue," he said.

While the Arab League helps organise Arab summits, there is no item in its charter that deals with the mechanism of Arab summits. The charter gives executive powers to the League's council as represented by the Arab foreign ministers. However, there are suggestions to add an item concerning Arab summits in the draft of the amendments to the League's charter.

Under normal circumstances, the League arranges Arab summits. But in the case of emergency summits, it co-ordinates with the hosting country. Accordingly during last week's summit, arrangements were made by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry in cooperation with the League which acted as executive secretariat. The League also provided background studies related to the issues discussed.

Arab states have convened for 21 summits, 7 of which were emergency summits. The first was held in Cairo in 1964, and addressed the necessity of unifying the Arab front against Israel.

Another summit was held during the same year in Alexandria which saw the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Another important summit was held in Khartoum in 1967 after the Arab-Israeli war to discuss means of alleviating the war's consequences.

After the eruption of the 1973 War, a summit was held in Algiers to discuss financial and military support for the Arab front.

The first emergency summit was held in Riyadh in 1976 to discuss the civil war in Lebanon and the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon. The last one, which condemned Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait, was held in Cairo in 1990.

During its early years, the Arab League was considered the voice of Arab hopes. It played a significant role in confronting Zionist aggression on Palestinians until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 — a conflict which gave impetus to the organisation's establishment in 1945. The League also played a major role in supporting Arab countries struggling for independence and helped to end the war between Iran and Iraq in the 80s.

In recent years, however, the Arab League was the target of sharp criticism from Arab intellectuals who charge that the League has recently been a disappointment and failure. Some have called for a change in its charter, while others believe that inter-Arab disputes leave the League's future hanging in the balance.

The most critical phase in the history of the League was that which followed the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Disputes split the League and since then it has not regained its former status.

Moreover, the organisation has faced serious financial problems due to the reluctance of state members to finance its activities. Some member states protest that the League earmarks more funds for employee wages than for projects. Others argue that their dues are more than they can afford.

Explaining reasons behind the League's setbacks, Matar said that it is mainly the lack of confidence among Arab states and foreign pressure on the Arab world. He added that countries like the US, Israel and Turkey were alarmed by the latest Arab gathering.

Matar also stated that religious and ethnic loyalties outweigh the notion of Arab nationalism. "Whereas there is no contradiction between the two notions, some foreign powers have tried to divide them to cause unrest in the region," he said.

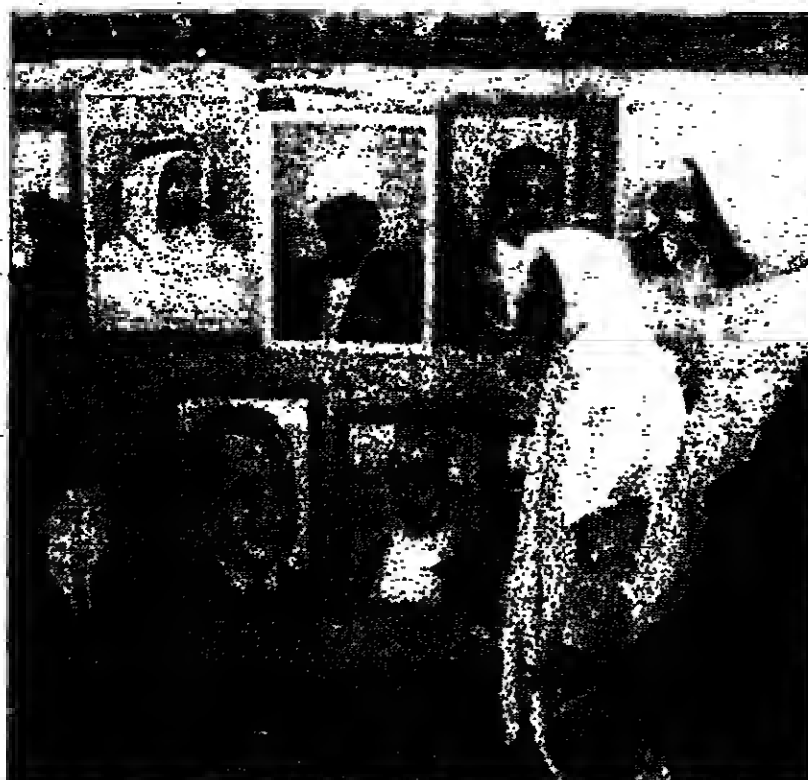
The League's diminished status motivated many countries to solve their disputes through external channels. Other regional groupings have been formed without the League's coordination, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Maghreb Union. According to some observers, this has undermined the League's efficiency. The League was also threatened by the notion of a Middle East order that includes Israel.

Salah Al-Mokhtar, editor-in-chief of the Iraqi *Jumhuriya* newspaper and former assistant secretary-general of the Arab League, expressed his disappointment with the summit's final communiqué, charging that it used a milder tone with Israel though it is still occupying Arab lands.

"How can the Arabs negotiate with Israel and isolate Iraq? Is it easier to reconcile brothers or to reconcile with Israel? There is more than one non-Arab country demanding the lifting of the UN sanctions against Iraq. Are they more Arab than the Arabs?" questioned Al-Mokhtar.

He added that Iraq is still doing its best to work towards Arab reconciliation, however he believes that the ball is not in Iraq's court.

"The UN stage caused the death of over 1 million Iraqis. If the League did not give this issue proper attention, the new Iraqi generation will never forget and will always have another power to resort to," he warned.



Portraits of Arab leaders, including Gamal Abdel-Nasser, are displayed for sale in a street in downtown Cairo (photo: AP)



Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad (centre) and Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir (far right) were among the 14 heads of state who attended the summit

The Arabs united?

Arabs met this week to patch up long-standing disputes, but soon decided to freeze their bitter feuds to forge Arab solidarity. **Nevine Khalil** looks behind the scenes

Hours before the Arab summit opened, there was a flurry of activity intent on diffusing inter-Arab tensions, with meetings between the Syrians, Palestinians and Jordanians. However, as the summit progressed, the peace process took centre stage and Arab leaders decided to postpone ironing out their differences to a later date, and an absent Iraq remained a thorn in everybody's side.

Although President Hosni Mubarak said that the summit's main aim was "to work on uniting the Arab fold", even he could only describe his meeting with Sudan's Omar Al-Bashir as "positive to a certain extent".

Mubarak met with Bashir almost one year to the day after Khartoum was accused of backing an attempt to assassinate Mubarak in Addis Ababa on 26 June, 1995. Trying to make amends, Sudan's president gave Mubarak a bear-hug upon his arrival at Cairo airport, but the walk to the presidential terminal was made in silence. Bashir had paraded with a serious face during the summit, until he met with Mubarak hours before it closed. The meeting only slightly warmed the frosty relations, but Bashir was more cheerful and spoke to the press later, saying that contacts with Mubarak will continue.

"We have agreed that we will cooperate to deal with all forms of terrorism," said Bashir, adding that they had reached an accord on a "mechanism" to work out security issues. Egyptian and Sudanese officials will meet soon to coordinate ideas concerning security matters.

Sudan is accused of training and harbouring Islamic militants, including those suspected of the failed attempt on Mubarak's life. Although Khartoum denied the charges, the UN Security Council imposed diplomatic

sanctions on Sudan in May. Fearing a more unstable and militant southern neighbour, Egypt supported the lighter sanctions instead of strong economic or arms embargoes. Bashir reported that he informed Mubarak of all "the measures we have taken to hunt down and arrest" the three suspects.

Syria too is accused of sending terrorists into neighbouring Jordan, a claim which has further soured relations between the two states. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad was previously angered when King Hussein and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat broke Arab ranks by signing separate peace deals with Israel in 1993 and 1994 respectively.

Assad, however, diffused tensions by meeting King Hussein twice during the two-day summit and sitting with Arafat on its eve; both meetings were brokered by President Mubarak.

Nabil Shaath, Palestinian minister of international cooperation, described the meeting as "positive, friendly and constructive". He added that it "opened a new page" in relations, and will be followed by a visit by Arafat to Damascus soon.

Syria's president embraced and shook hands with Arafat for the first time in three years, and the next day broke the silence of two years when he talked for an hour with Hussein.

The monarch came out of the meeting describing Assad as a "dear and old friend", saying that this was a "good beginning", with more meetings to come. Sources close to President Assad told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the meeting "went very well" and that priority was given to the summit's agenda. The Syrian delegation however, did

not clap at the end of Hussein's speech during a closed session in which he said that terrorism "will only create enemies on all fronts". Amman accused Damascus of supporting terrorist groups in its territories aiming to undermine its peace agreement with Israel.

Assad and Hussein met again after the summit closed and it was reported that the monarch gave Assad a dossier on 56 attempted attacks, implicating radical Palestinian groups based in Syria.

"I am sure that our Syrian brothers will take all the necessary measures to put an end to these attempts to destabilise our country," King Hussein told reporters.

Obviously more meetings, discussions and explanations need to be made before the Arabs are united, and in their final communiqué, they agreed to holding annual summits. Sources reported that President Zeln Al-Abidin bin Ali of Tunisia offered to host the next summit, but Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had other ideas. He said that "the most important result of this summit is my proposal to set up an Arab federation which will be discussed at the next summit in Damascus."

Tripoli too has problems and its staunch opposition towards Israel and the West, has resulted in a number of clashes with other Arab countries. In a show of opposition to the Palestinian-Israeli peace accord, Gaddafi expelled thousands of Palestinians from Libya last year and promised more expulsions next July. Gaddafi, however, got a chance to speak with Arafat on the last day of the summit, but it is unclear

how discussions went. Tripoli's reasoning is that since the Palestinians now believe they have a homeland they should return to it. During the summit, the colonel called on Palestinians in other Arab countries to take "an olive branch" and march back to their territories.

Independent-thinking Gaddafi also damaged relations with Kuwait when he bluntly declared at Cairo University last month that Kuwait should not have been liberated from Iraqi occupation "if it can't defend itself". The statement was in reference to the 1990 invasion of the Gulf state by Iraq, which resulted in many fractures among the Arabs and was the reason why Arabs did not meet en masse for the next six years. Nonetheless, a four-way meeting between Gaddafi and Kuwait's Crown Prince Saad Al-Sabbah took place after the summit closed, and was attended by Mubarak and Assad.

The invasion of Kuwait divided a disunited Arab world into two camps. Among others, Gaddafi, King Hussein and Arafat sided with Saddam Hussein's actions, while the rest of the Arab world joined the Western alliance to liberate Kuwait. After half a dozen years, the time was still not right for Iraq to take its place among its brethren, but is expected to do so eventually. As a symbol, the Iraqi flag was placed in front of an empty chair at the conference table, and although absent in body, Iraq was present in spirit.

Meeting by accident in the hotel lobby, Kuwait's Crown Prince and Arafat stood stone-faced and hesitated for a fraction of a second before passing each other without acknowledgment. Kuwait was apparently pushing for a

stronger statement against Iraq in the final communiqué, while Yemen, Algeria and Morocco tried to call for the return of Iraq to the Arab fold.

"How can Arabs normalise with the Zionist entity while keeping Iraq from the Arab fold? It's illogical," Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh told reporters. Yemen, which stood by Baghdad during the Gulf crisis, had hoped that Iraq would be present "since the gathering was dedicated to re-establishing Arab solidarity," Saleh said. The final communiqué said that only when Iraq stops its aggressive and provocative policies against its neighbours and carries out UN resolutions, will it be reintegrated with the Arabs.

Gaddafi, however, withheld that "Iraq never left the Arab family."

Borders are another volatile issue among the Arabs which have especially plagued the Arab Peninsula. Over the years, disputes erupted between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as Qatar and Bahrain. Speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Bahrain's Emir Issa bin Salman called on Arab nations to "improve their bilateral ties to open the way to solving ongoing differences [especially] border disputes". GCC states met before the summit to coordinate their stand, with Sheikh Eissa bin Salman at the helm. The Bahraini emir was the only Gulf head of state to attend in person, while Saudi Arabia — the initiator of the summit along with Egypt and Syria — Abu Dhabi and Kuwait sent their crown princes. Oman and Qatar, the only Gulf states to establish trade links with Israel sent their deputy prime ministers.

In conclusion, the summit was a beginning, and as President Mubarak told reporters it aimed to "ease the situation so the spirit will be good and we can deal with each other as brothers."

Hand out to Sudan

Mubarak met Sudanese President Bashir during the summit. Could it herald the end of bad blood between Egypt and its neighbour, asks **Khaled Dawoud**

The meeting during the Cairo Arab Summit between Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Sudanese counterpart, Omar Al-Bashir, has been described as a "first step" towards solving differences between the two countries. Relations had soured after Cairo accused Khartoum of harbouring Islamic militants involved in violent activities in several Arab countries.

According to Egyptian diplomatic sources, Mubarak, the host of the summit which was aimed at Arab reconciliation, agreed to meet Bashir despite the widely held belief among observers that Khartoum still had a long way to go before any talks could begin on mending relations between the two countries. Several Arab efforts — mainly Libyan — to conduct such a meeting had failed in the past.

The same sources said that Sudan's recent statements that it wanted to improve ties with Egypt had not been translated into action before this week. Khartoum has praised Mubarak's rejection of proposals to impose international sanctions which would harm the interests of the Sudanese people and, more importantly, has closed down military camps that are allegedly used to train militant Islamic groups.

President Mubarak's top political advisor, Osama El-Baz, told members of the Foreign Press Association on Monday that the meeting between the two presidents prepared the ground for further meetings between officials from the two countries.

"There is some progress in relations with Sudan, which could be considered an achievement," El-Baz said.

Although an Egyptian-Sudanese security agreement has not been reached yet, El-Baz and Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Othman Taha said that it was being discussed and would be announced as soon as it occurred.

The fact that Sudanese Interior Minister Colonel Hassan Bakri was the first member of Sudan's summit delegation to arrive in Cairo, three days before its opening, suggested that the two countries were seriously considering the contentious issue. Later meetings between security officials from the two countries seemed to confirm this.

Security sources said that Egypt had presented Sudan with documented files, including detailed information on "terrorist training camps inside Sudan and confessions by members of terrorist groups arrested over the past two years that they have crossed the border into Egypt from Sudan".

Egypt is particularly concerned that Sudan should cooperate in

handing over to Ethiopia three militants involved in the failed attempt on Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa last June. The Egyptian president was at the time in the Ethiopian capital to attend an African summit meeting there. Such a move by Sudan would enable Cairo to avoid pressure from the UN Security Council to agree to further sanctions against Sudan when the issue comes up again for discussion in July.



Side by side: Mubarak and Bashir

The Security Council imposed diplomatic sanctions against Sudan in April for its refusal to surrender the three men involved in the assassination attempt, and gave Khartoum three months to comply before it reconsidered the issue. Sudan's Ali Othman Taha denied in statements during the summit that the three suspects were in Sudan. He claimed that the only suspect who was previously in Sudan, Mustafa Hamza, had now settled in Afghanistan, while security authorities had not been able to identify the other two.

Yet problems between Egypt and Sudan started long before the failed assassination attempt on Mubarak. Since taking over power in 1989 in a military coup, Bashir has built a strong alliance with the leader of the National Islamic Front, Hassan Al-Turabi, who not only acts as mentor of the Sudanese regime, but is seen by observers as the real ruler of the country. Turabi is also speaker of the Sudanese parliament.

Shortly after the 1989 coup, Turabi established his own armed

militia, known as the Popular Army, on the pretext that he wanted to fight rebels in the south. He also pressured Bashir to reshuffle the official army to exclude those who opposed his extremist Islamic approach, and talked about an international Islamic movement.

Such is the control Turabi and his supporters maintain over the government that it will be very difficult indeed for Bashir to implement any of the action Egypt and Sudan's other neighbours want him to carry out. Bashir is being pressured to cut support for militant groups — not only those in Egypt and other Arab countries, but also ones in places such as Eritrea, Uganda and Ethiopia.

In his meeting with Bashir, Mubarak raised more than just the issue of terrorism. He spoke of other measures which the Sudanese government have taken against Egyptian institutions in Khartoum, including closing down schools, universities and the residence of Egyptian irrigation officials. Mubarak said that such acts had shocked many Egyptians who still believed that strong ties existed between the two countries despite any political differences. Egyptian newspapers and television programmes have also been banned in Sudan.

The only Egyptian newspaper which is still allowed into Sudan is the pro-Islamist *Al-Shaab*, the mouthpiece of the Labour Party. Thus it was only natural that *Al-Shaab* was the only Egyptian paper given an interview by Bashir.

In the interview, Bashir said that his meeting with Mubarak was positive and helped in "opening a new page" in relations between the two countries. He added that the two leaders had agreed on meetings being held between officials on all levels to discuss security issues.

Asked what he meant by security issues, Bashir said, "It is the issue of the presence of some Islamic groups in Sudan. We confirmed that there aren't any elements [members of Islamic groups] now in Sudan. And we are ready to cooperate in this field in case there is information available on the presence of such elements in Sudan." He said the two leaders also agreed to solve other existing differences. Neither Mubarak nor Bashir mentioned the border dispute over the desert triangle of Halayeb.

Commenting on Bashir's statement of "opening a new page", an Egyptian diplomatic source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "We do not mind opening a new page, but we have to close the previous one first. The problems between us and Sudan are not theoretical ones; there are matters that need to be carried out."

No Florentine free-for-all

The British would have rather had beef on the Florence summit menu, but their European Union partners insisted on discussing unemployment and monetary union instead, writes
Gamal Nkrumah

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche cautioned against granting everyone what they feel they deserve because it effectively creates chaos no matter how well meaning the motive. The point is that one cannot please everyone all the time. But this is precisely what regional groupings are meant to accomplish. So is Nietzsche dead? Nietzsche, whose ideas inspired the Nazis, also came up with the idea of aspiring to superhuman status through will power and a "will to power". Member states of regional groupings appear to try desperately to become super-nations through Nietzsche's "will to power".

Europeans realise that continental or regional groupings are a *sine qua non* of facing up to the 21st century. Europeans seem also to have learnt the lesson that regional groupings are no sinecures. Regional groupings come with responsibilities, obligations and sacrifices — especially of the sacred cow of national sovereignty. For many in the Third World, regional groupings are a free-for-all to further national agendas. Many in the South seem to want to see regional groupings essentially as a sinecure of sorts — a heaven-sent requirement of the age.

The summit meeting of the 15 European Union heads of state was convened in the historic Italian city of Florence last Friday. Every single EU head of state attended. Even Britain, Europe's *de facto* leader, showed up. The Arab summit meeting took place last Saturday. The Arab world's *de facto* leader, Iraq, was not invited and not all Arab heads of state came to Cairo for the summit. The two events, the Florence and Cairo summits, are of course not connected. The EU is as much an economic as a political grouping. The Arab League is not an economic grouping. Regular summit meetings are an intrinsic institutional feature of the EU, but are optional with Arab League members.

The fact that the EU is an economic grouping and the Arab League is not hints at the distinction between Northern regional groupings and Southern ones. Southern groupings might have catchy acronyms like ECOWAS (West Africa), COMESA (East and Southern Africa) and SARC (South Asia), but it is only ASEAN (South East Asia) that is a viable economic grouping. The truth is that it is much easier to organise a rich men's club than to get an underdogs' league going. Moreover, the EU is not the sort of entity that any Southern regional grouping can influence or manipulate. But ECOWAS, COMESA and other Third World groupings are often subjected to EU pressure. For instance, they are being pressed to down the bitter potion of structural adjustment programmes prescribed by international financial institutions. And, for good reason, they are pushed to speed up democratisation processes, institute multi-party political systems and halt gross human rights violations.

The Europeans are interested in presenting an alternative and independent voice in the American-dominated international world order. The 15 EU leaders expressed "deep concern" about the American Burton-Holmes Act which allows the United States to sue foreign firms that do business in Cuba. The final communiqué of the Florence EU summit warned that any US attempt to punish foreign firms that do business in Cuba, Iran and Libya would inevitably prove counter-productive. The US House of Representatives approved legislation penalising companies that do business with Libya and Iran last Wednesday. "We are surprised by this unprovoked escalation [of the crisis between Libya, Iran and Cuba, on the one hand, and the US, on the other] which damages the interests of allies of the US," said Libya's Secretary for Arab Affairs Jumaa Al-Fazfazi in Cairo last week. Many European countries maintain extensive economic and commercial links with Cuba, Iran and Libya.

But let us not kid ourselves that the Western alliance is stronger than ever before. As the Dutch foreign minister said in Florence, "No one in Europe feels the need to hinder the current [US Pres-

ident Bill Clinton] administration." Last December, in a reversal of Gaullist policy, French President Jacques Chirac decided to fully reintegrate France into the military structures of the American-dominated North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Washington, in turn, conceded that Europe must play a greater role in organising joint operations. Chirac, in sharp contrast to Charles de Gaulle, wants a European defence capability within NATO. Chirac's France is proposing that Paris places its nuclear deterrent at the service of Europe. Soon, Europe's non-nuclear powers, say Germany or Italy, could be consulted on the decision-making processes of the two European nuclear powers — France and Britain. Europe has come a long way from the days of World War II; it has even managed to bridge the chasm between the anti-Anglo-Saxon Gaullists and the pro-American Atlanticists of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Italians currently have the EU presidency, so working lunches at the summit were inevitably long. In Florence, there was ample opportunity to discuss meatier matters. The subject of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease, was not allowed to dominate the deliberations. The mad cow row aside, Britain is an important country that cannot be cowed or booted out of the EU. "There is a very broad reaction against the British attitude and, as they call it in some newspapers, British arrogance," European Commission President Jacques Santer warned. "We are coming to the moment of truth. We are going as far as the limit of our possible tolerance, and the [EU] members' tolerance."

Fisheries also emerged as a bone of contention between Britain and its European partners. "We have the ludicrous situation of Spanish boats with Spanish crews and Spanish skippers leaving Spanish ports to fish in our waters and then returning to port to land our fish. It comes off the British quota not their own," British Fisheries Minister Tony Baldry remonstrated with his EU partners in the run-up to the Florence summit meeting. But Brussels was neither sympathetic nor very accommodating. The European Commission is furious with the British refusal to declare the sizes of its fishing fleet and its catch. Brussels wants the British fishing fleet cut by 40 per cent.

Britain negotiated an opt-out from the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty. Both Britain and Germany argue that employment policy should remain the preserve of the national governments of EU member states. Sweden, an erstwhile model social welfare state, along with Denmark, Finland and France, pushed hardest for a common European employment policy. Most European countries, including Sweden, have had to backtrack on social security benefits. Cuts in pensions and unemployment benefits have caused widespread dissatisfaction. The labour unions have been up in arms.

German economic recovery is a prerequisite for securing an upturn in European economic growth rates. Gross domestic product growth is forecast to hover around 0.5 per cent in Germany in 1996. The European Commission released a report last month which painted a bleak economic picture of Europe's economy. While there were fears that the German inflation rate would rise slightly, the greater worry was that few EU member states would meet the Maastricht convergence criteria for a common European currency. Monetary union seems as elusive an aim as ever. Only Luxembourg, Germany and France seem to satisfy the stringent requirements for it. So will the strict criteria — covering debt and government deficit reductions, a fall in inflation rates and exchange rate stability — be relaxed? No. "I'm strongly against changing the convergence criteria. Without these strict yardsticks, the efforts at economic consolidation will not be successful," warned German Chancellor Helmut Kohl last month.

Friedhelm Ost, a member of the Bundestag, or German lower house of parliament, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The earlier the social welfare state is re-

formed the quicker our growth rate will be and the less unemployment becomes a problem." Ost's views coincide with many of Europe's leaders. Nietzsche is very much alive. Still, "jobs are a major concern for the citizens of Europe. They should also be a major concern for its leaders," countered French presidential spokeswoman Catherine Colonna.

"It is important to show the European citizen that his concerns are at the heart of the EU's agenda," said Santer, whose European Commission is the highest decision-making body in Europe today. "Employment is our first priority," stressed Santer upon his arrival in Florence. Santer appeared determined to end the 11 per cent unemployment rate across the EU member states. The EU member states have about 18 million unemployed people and countries like France have been embroiled in civil strife and nationwide strikes. Last week German labour unions demonstrated their discontent by protesting in front of the Bundestag. German companies increasingly work as subcontractors in Eastern Europe and Third World countries where labour costs are cheaper, thereby reducing the proportion of German content in goods exported from Germany.

In Florence there was much bickering, but as Europeans fret over rising unemployment, their predicament leaves Third World onlookers cold. In Nietzsche's scheme of things, the "will to power" is at play. European leaders sometimes behave like bare-faced bigots, watching Third World leaders booing like babies with begging bowls. The South's leaders are treated like beggars, at any rate. All *bona fide* Third World basket cases will receive European aid, the leaders of the least developed countries (LDCs) are periodically assured. But subcontracting rarely involves the LDCs. Invariably its impact is felt in the newly industrialised countries (NICs).

German companies seem to be set to share in the strong expansion in world trade. They have had notable successes, particularly in areas of strong growth in South East Asia and Eastern Europe. Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank, noted in a report released last week. However, it added a note of caution: "Despite the undoubted lightening of prospects in foreign trade, the speed-up in exports is not yet definitely guaranteed." Still, many orders from abroad are actually supplied by subcontracted workers and subsidiaries of German multinationals in the Third World and Eastern Europe.

Bearing in mind the pre-World War II experience of the Weimar Republic, the rise of the Nazis and Nietzsche's theories, the Bundesbank's priority is keeping inflation under control. It was rampant inflation that ruined Germany — and Europe too. So far the bank has succeeded. "As far as monetary policy is concerned, the success achieved in stabilising prices must be built on, and the foundations strengthened to achieve sustainable and tension-free growth," the Bundesbank report stressed.

Germany is Europe's economic powerhouse. The Third World watches uneasily as filtering economic trends in Germany augur ill for both Europe and the Third World. The German economy is falling behind the economies with which Germans like to compare theirs. These are increasingly the NICs of South East Asia. At home, Germans have been venting their fury over the ever-rising tide of immigrants from Africa, Asia and especially Turkey. Xenophobic outbursts rocked Rostock in August 1992 and Mölln, Schleswig-Holstein, in November 1992, and has been simmering ever since. A word to the wise, if you are a Third World national residing and working in Europe, it is time to fasten your seat-belt — or do your rucksack; it is far more lucrative to go back home and pluck the plum pickings of subcontracting jobs.



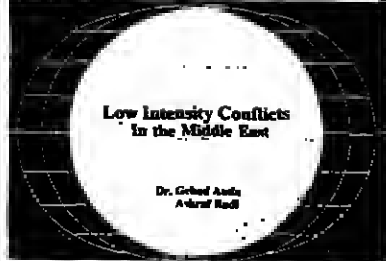
Ghali launches campaign

FACING Washington's "irrevocable decision" to oppose his re-election for another five-year term, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali started to rally for the support of Third World nations.

On Sunday, Arab leaders meeting in Cairo for the Arab Summit unanimously decided to endorse Ghali's candidacy. The UN chief executive similarly hopes to gain the endorsement of African lead-

ers at the 8 July summit for the Organisation of African Unity to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The US resolve to block Ghali's candidacy, through a Security Council veto if necessary, may have been triggered by Ghali's decision to publish the UN report on the recent Israeli massacre of 200 civilians in Qana, Lebanon — a decision strongly opposed by the Clinton administration. (photo: AFP)

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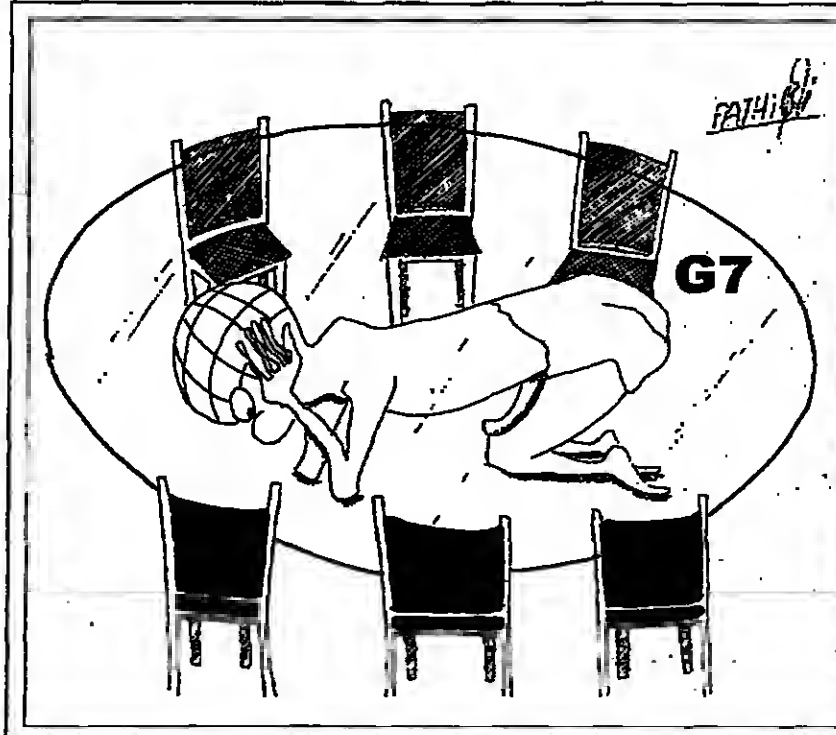
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Bangladeshi PM sworn in

SHEIKH Hasina Wajed was sworn in as Bangladesh's prime minister on Monday, to lead the South Asian country into the next century. She appointed her cabinet and kept two important positions for herself: defence and textiles. The inauguration ceremony of Wajed and her 19-member council of ministers took place during a ceremony in the Bangabhaban Presidential Palace.

Wajed, 49, led her Awami League (AL) to victory in the 12 June general elections after a gruelling 20-year stint in the opposition. The AL, which is celebrating the 47th anniversary of its founding, won a five-year term in office. The AL still faces threats from its main rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which has said it will challenge the election results in 111 constituencies. The BNP, led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, boycotted the swearing-in ceremony.

Wajed became only the second prime minister to be chosen in free and fair elections in Bangladesh since it gained independence in 1971. Since then, this poor and densely populated nation has seen two presidents assassinated, three coups and 18 failed coup attempts. Military and quasi-military governments ruled the country for 15 years.

Papandreou dies

FORMER Greek premier and veteran socialist leader Andreas Papandreou died on Sunday, drawing the curtain on a tumultuous political life marked by time in prison, corruption scandals and political comebacks. The 77-year-old, dogged by serious health problems over the past 12 months, died from heart failure in his home in the Athens suburb of Ekali.

News of his death plunged the nation into mourning. Hundreds of Greeks gathered outside Athens' Orthodox Cathedral to pay tribute as his body arrived, accompanied by his young widow and leading members of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) he founded in 1974.

Prime Minister Costas Simitis, speaking in Florence after the European Union summit, said Papandreou's death was "a national loss". Simitis, a rival of Papandreou within the socialist party, said Papandreou had "left us his living legacy" and PASOK would continue to work to realise Papandreou's "vision". Simitis was a fierce critic of his predecessor's nationalism and notably of his handling of Greece's long-running disputes with Turkey over Aegean Sea territory and the divided island of Cyprus.

Philippine autonomy talks

TALKS to end a 24-year-old Muslim insurgency passed their biggest obstacle when government and rebel negotiators agreed to set up the forerunner of an autonomous Muslim government in the southern Philippines. Last Sunday, government and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) negotiators announced at the end of three days of talks that they had reached "full consensus" for establishing a transitional government to prepare for the creation of a Muslim autonomous region. The agreement will be signed within three months.

The intermediate step involves setting up an MNLF-led council to supervise a "special zone of peace and development" covering 14 provinces and nine cities on the main southern island of Mindanao and outlying islands. The council will later be replaced by a new autonomous government for Muslims in the region.

No agreement was reached on an MNLF demand to allow 20,000 of its guerrillas to act as a security force, but the two sides concurred that a special regional security force would be set up once the autonomous government is established.

Compiled by Heba Samir

Arithmetic of reform

Simple arithmetic will go a long way to unravelling the mysteries of complex economic policies. In a speech to members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt last week, Minister of State for Economic Affairs **Youssef Boutros Ghali** number-crunched to explain from where the government gets its target growth rates. *Al-Ahram Weekly* publishes excerpts from his speech

There are several varied principles of economic governance in the second phase of the economic reform in Egypt, chief among them is the need for private sector participation. Not so much in terms of production, exports or imports, but in the way the economy is run. This not only goes beyond decision-making, it also goes beyond the drafting and passing of laws and into the fundamental day-to-day management of the economy.

For this to happen, we need three things. First, the private sector needs forums in which to express an opinion on what the government is doing. If you disapprove of a government policy, it is reflected immediately in the stock market, the exchange market or the money market. Second, the private sector has to have the capacity to lead. It will no longer take its cue from the government. Third, the private sector needs information. This new government is working at making information on various aspects of the economy easily accessible to all. What I bring to you today is a mixture of tools and information.

The central theme of the second phase of the reform programme is investment. We have to create jobs, the only way to create jobs is through investment, and the only way to invest is to have the savings to do it. However, there is a lot of confusion about savings. Some people will tell you that we have plenty of liquidity in the banks. Others will say we have plenty of lending available to whoever wants to invest. More adventurous souls will say, why don't you raise interest rates so that people will inject money into the banking system. All of these misconceptions are natural — and dangerous.

Now let me put in a bit of an abstraction, and look at the Egyptian economy as producing a single commodity. Let us assume that commodity is wheat. Further assume that we produce 225 tons of wheat per year. We consumed 201 tons, planted 38 tons, and had to import 14 from abroad. No conclusion that I reach here differs when I expand the argument to encompass a larger system. This is the fundamental equation of the Egyptian economy, these are real numbers. But we are speaking in terms of Egyptian pounds, not tons. Savings in Egypt are not the excess liquidity in the banking system, it is not the credit available from the banking system, it is what we do not consume in terms of goods and services.

These are the numbers that reflect the status of the Egyptian economy. As of June 1996, income produced by domestic factors of production amounts to LE225 billion, plus or minus five per cent. We consume LE201 billion at current prices. The private sector consumes LE177 billion and the public sector consumes LE24 billion. We invest LE38 billion, and we have a foreign balance, from the outside world, roughly equaling LE14 billion. Investments, which drive our system by generating employment and growth, are roughly LE38 billion. This figure means we need to generate 16.8 per cent in savings, either ours or somebody else's. Domestically, our savings amount only to 10.6 per cent of our income, which in turn means that we don't save enough. We intend to generate additional savings from abroad, until this figure is increased. Of the LE38 billion in investments in 1995-96, LE24 billion was from the private sector, and Egyptians refraining from consumption. The remaining LE14 billion came from workers' remittances, and foreign transfers and grants. Again, it is somebody else, either in the US or in other countries, that has refrained from consuming and sent the money to us. This is the same scenario as the one painted by the wheat example. Therefore about 6.2 per cent out of about 16.8 percent comes from outside our borders.

The fundamental aim of the second phase is to generate employment. We must generate at least 500,000 jobs per year. It costs on average, LE100,000 to generate one job, or a total of LE50 billion for all the jobs needed.

It takes five pounds to generate one pound of income and, therefore, LE50 billion in investments will generate LE10 billion in income. This means that our income of LE225 billion has to grow by at least 5 per cent to be able to absorb the new work force.

However, if we use less sophisticated technology, each job will cost only LE80,000 reducing the cost of 500,000 jobs to LE40 billion. This translates into LE8 billion of additional income, which means we need to grow at least at 3.5 percent per year.

In the first scenario, we need LE50 billion, and therefore need to invest 22 per cent of our income to reach this figure. However, since we save only 10.6 per cent of our income, the remaining amount must come from foreign investments. We need \$3.5 billion of foreign direct investments per year, about seven-times the foreign investments that Egypt attracted last year.

In the second scenario we need to invest LE40 billion, about 18 per cent of our income. However, this is a scenario we don't want to stick to for too long because it will affect our capacity to introduce modern technology, increase our competitiveness and ultimately our capacity to generate additional savings.

If we look at the other side of the equation, we have to keep in mind that we need to have a per capita income growth of at least five per cent for this growth to trickle down to all strata of society. Our population growth is about two per cent which means we have to grow at seven per cent.

Let's start with income growth this time. We need seven per cent growth, which means our income of LE225 billion has to increase by LE16 billion each year. To do so we need LE80 billion in investments. We have, today LE38 billion, and therefore need LE42 billion from outside the system. This means we need about LE12 billion (\$4 billion) a year in foreign investments.

To maintain the unemployment rate at its present level, we need a 3.5 per cent growth rate. Ideally, we would like to grow at 7 per cent. But we can't increase private savings overnight. We have pushed public savings as far as they will go. Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) are with the reach of the Egyptian economy. With a few institutional changes we can get \$3 to 4 billion a year in foreign investments.

Now let me make a small distinction that is important. FDIs mean somebody comes in with money and establishes a factory. Foreign financial investment is when somebody sends money to purchase stock on the Egyptian stock exchange. The figure we mentioned was foreign investment, direct and financial.

There are four dimensions which measure the ability of a country such as Egypt to attract foreign direct investment: socio-political stability, the business environment, the capacity of the country to export and stock market activity. The socio-political factor is difficult to measure and its effect is fairly small. The business climate and export orientation have no effect below a certain threshold of foreign investments. Unless you reach a minimum of \$1.5 billion a year in foreign investments, it does not matter what business climate you have. Increased capacity to export will improve the capacity to attract foreign investment only up to a certain point. However, FDI inflow increases the capacity to export which, in turn, increases the capacity to attract foreign investment, creating a beneficial cycle. An active stock market will attract foreign financial investment, which in turn, will attract FDIs.

These are the fundamentals of Egyptian macro-economic policy planning in the second phase of reform. These are the equations that reflect this formula — the skeleton of our budget. We are changing this skeleton and we are introducing the reforms to make it more adaptable to the international environment. The new government has taken all the right measures that will enable us to provide a foreign investor-friendly environment that will help us realise a seven per cent growth rate. The active participation of the private sector in the government of this economy is fundamental. If you are not in it to govern, we are not going to take off.

Bank-ownership ceiling lifted

While bankers cheered a new law allowing foreign banks to gain majority ownership of joint-venture banks, some MPs were less than thrilled at the prospect. **Niveen Wahish and Gamal Essam El-Din** report

In line with the government's economic liberalisation policies and, in an effort to give banks a larger role in economic development, the People's Assembly last week overwhelmingly approved a new law that allows non-Egyptians to own more than 49 per cent of shares in joint-venture banks. This legislative amendment, a modification of Law 95 of 1992, is expected to give joint-venture banks a larger role in contributing to economic development and a greater capacity in dealing with international financial markets. However, the amendment prevents individuals from owning more than 10 per cent of a joint-venture bank's issued capital except with the prior approval of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE).

"The new law has set things straight," commented Giles Cutayar, joint managing director of Banque du Caire-Barclays International. He said that Barclays has long been struggling to obtain majority shareholding in the Banque du Caire. "It is not because we don't get along with our Egyptian partners; it is a matter of policy." Barclays holds majority shareholdings in joint-ventures in over 75 countries. Cutayar said Egypt is the only country where Barclays has minority shares. Cairo Barclays is 49 per cent owned by Barclays International and 51 per cent owned by Banque du Caire.

Before the law was passed, Cutayar said that representatives of the bank did not miss any opportunity to talk with the government about the issue. Now that the law has been changed, "we are more than happy," he stated.

Speaking about the bank's future plans after the passage of the law, Cutayar said that the Barclays board of directors has taken a decision "in principle" to buy the shares of Banque du Caire. And Banque du Caire has also agreed "in principle" to sell its share to Barclays.

Cutayar said that they will start out by evaluating the bank. "Based on this evaluation we will refer the matter to Barclays in London." From then on if they find that it is a valuable

proposition, Barclays will negotiate with Banque du Caire.

According to Cutayar, before the new law was passed, non-Egyptian partners in joint-venture banks felt discriminated against. He recalled that Barclays had originally agreed to hold minority shares in order to be able to deal in both local and foreign currency.

Two years ago, branches of foreign banks were permitted to deal in local currency, something they could not do before. "This put us at a disadvantage."

"We entered into a partnership with a local bank, and agreed to hold minority shares in order to be able to do just that," he said.

Highlighting the advantages of being 100 per cent owners of the bank, Cutayar said that one benefit is that only one managing director will be responsible for the bank versus two. In addition, it will assist the bank in expanding its business. However, Cutayar said, this change will not be "anything out of this world". It will be a change in the system, in addition to an expansion of services. "This will not take place overnight either," he said. Moreover, being 100 per cent owned by Barclays means the bank will receive more assistance from Barclays International.

"The money used to buy the share of Banque du Caire, alone, will be a plus for Egypt's economy," he said.

Concurring with Cutayar, Mounir El-Zahed, general manager for Corporate Banking of the Egyptian-British Bank, said that the banking sector views the new law "very positively", since it is expected to attract substantial foreign investment into the country. "It allows ample flow of foreign capital into Egypt especially at a time when the public sector is divesting and diluting its share in joint-venture banks," said El-Zahed. He pointed out that the money that will be paid by the foreign partner to buy the shares of their Egyptian partners will be a huge investment in the Egyptian economy.

Stressing that the effect of the law will not be felt immediately, Philippe Gudez, deputy general manager of the National Bank of Egypt Société Générale (NBESG), said that the most significant advantage provided by this law is "future security". He explained that prior to the passing of the law, if the Egyptian partner wanted to sell their share of the bank, the foreign side could not do anything about it and may have found itself lumbered with an undesirable partner. Not only does the new law reassure foreign partners in joint-venture banks, it also allows those who are not satisfied with their status to buy out their partners.

NBESG is 49 per cent owned by the French bank Société Générale, 20 per cent owned by the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), and 31 per cent owned by the staff of both banks.

Gudez added that they are not only satisfied with the new law but with the broad steps the government is taking to deregulate the market. "It is good for the business," he stated.

But while bankers rejoiced over the new law, some members of parliament voiced their reservations. Sameh About, the Nasserist Party's only MP, said that he vehemently objected to the new amendment, which he argued, was a great threat to state-owned banks and the national economy, as a whole. The law will eventually enable foreigners to obtain full control of the national economy, Ashour said.

Khaled Mohamed, speaking for the leftist Targammu Party, also objected to the new law, arguing that the foreign competition could negatively affect the performance of the four major public-sector commercial banks in Egypt.

While he agrees that "this new law comes in line with the liberalisation policies," he said that he does not see what has changed since 1992, when the existing banking and credit law was approved by the Assembly.

Mohammed El-Gharib, added Finance Minister Mohamed El-Gharib, still performs 80 per cent of the banking sector's business in Egypt.

Yassin Serageldin, leader of the opposition Wafd Party in the parliament, contended that promoting the role of banks in economic development should not mean giving them total freedom while performing banking activities. According to Serageldin, the new law could bring joint-venture banks under the control of a few individuals. "It is true that each individual, according to the new law, is not allowed to possess more than 10 per cent of the bank's capital, but it is also possible for a number of relatives or friends to get together to acquire the majority of the bank's shares. In addition, individuals could always get the approval of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) to possess more than 10 per cent of the bank's capital," he added.

But for Mustafa El-Said, chairman of the Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee and a former minister of economy, the law was only a natural outgrowth of the currently liberalisation policies. The new law, explained El-Said, brings all the banks in Egypt, whether they are public-sector commercial banks, investment banks or joint-venture banks, under unified regulations in terms of financial dealings and ownership rights. "The fact that the government has liberalised the foreign exchange system and the banking sector makes it unreasonable to insist on imposing controls on performance of joint venture banks." He emphasised that these controls were discriminatory against joint-venture banks since they were providing almost the same services.

Abdel-Rahman Baraka, director-general of Misr-Romania Bank and a deputy for Atmida in the Daqahliya Governorate, speaking before the Assembly, dismissed any fears and sensitivity to foreign ownership of banks in Egypt. He argued that the new law still allows the CBE to retain control of joint-venture banks.

The public sector, added Finance Minister Mohamed El-Gharib, still performs 80 per cent of the banking sector's business in Egypt.

CIB goes global

A trend-setting Egyptian bank will become the first Egyptian company to register its shares on international markets. **Ghada Ragab** reports

The Commercial International Bank (CIB), established in the 1970s under the name of Chase Manhattan Bank, was the first joint venture between a local and foreign bank. It was the first bank to effectively sell itself out to the public sector and, next month, it will be the first Egyptian company whose shares are traded on a foreign stock exchange.

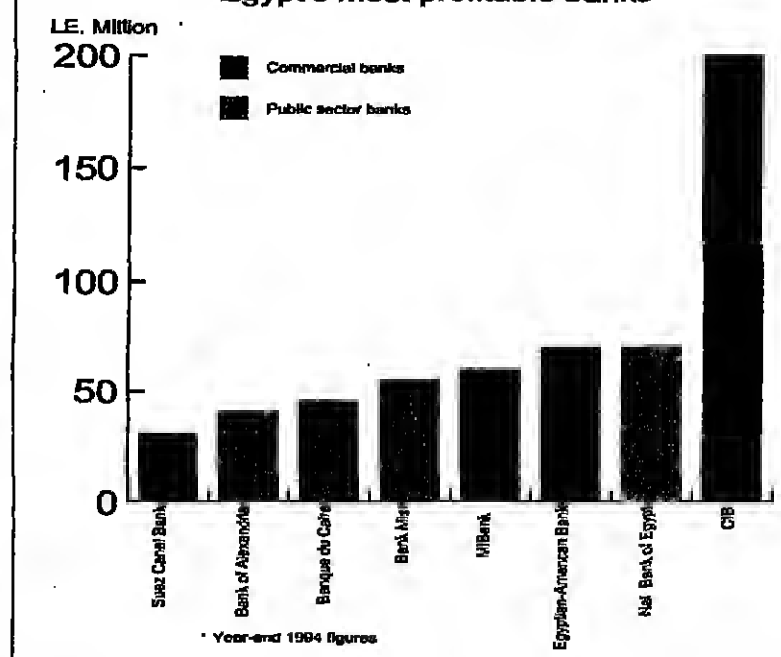
CIB's largest shareholder, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), a leading public sector bank, is scheduled to sell about 20 per cent of its shares in the CIB on the London Stock Exchange in July, reducing its holdings in the bank to 22 per cent. The shares will be offered in the form of Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) worth \$80-100 million.

"The GDR story is about Egypt being accepted by the investment community," said CIB's Managing Director Adel El-Labban. "The deal comes at a time when Egypt's image as an emerging market is improving."

The deal's global coordinators are ING Barings, and its co-lead managers are a syndicate that includes Robert Fleming and Co, Salomon Brothers and the Union Bank of Switzerland. Bankers Trust will act as the custodian bank, and will procure these shares on behalf of potential investors. The GDRs will be quoted in dollar terms. The deal's domestic advisor is the Commercial International Investment Company, CIB's merchant banking affiliate. GDRs are receipts representing a certain number of shares, and are issued by non-US companies outside the US, but can be exchanged in US stock markets. GDRs are mainly useful for investors who would like to invest in emerging markets, because they hedge against risk and problems of liquidity.

The move represents one more step on CIB's road towards privatisation. CIB started its life as the Chase National Bank, a joint venture between NBE and

Egypt's most profitable banks



Chase Manhattan Bank, the first foreign bank to venture into Egypt after Sadat announced his 1974 open-door policy. When Chase pulled out in 1987, it left NBE with full ownership of the bank. In 1992, NBE sold 30 per cent of its shares to its employees and those of CIB.

In 1993, a public share issue raised about LE400 million in new capital for CIB and reduced NBE's holdings to 42 per cent.

Other CIB shareholders include the International Finance Corporation, a World Bank subsidiary, with five per cent, and the Arab Investment Company, with three per cent. The remaining 50 per cent is

held by small investors.

Labban expects the GDR issue to enhance the local market value of the shares and to bring in the bank a new category of investors. "The GDR issue will create a new market for the shares, tapping foreign institutional demand—a category not heavily represented in the ownership, and we are quite happy at this prospect because it will facilitate raising large amounts of capital if we need to do so in the future," Labban added.

Posting profits of LE18 million in 1995, CIB is considered Egypt's most profitable bank. It ranks fourth in terms of net worth.

Investment promotion

IN AN effort to brief foreign investors about Egypt's increasingly investment-friendly environment, the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AmCham) is organising a one-day conference in London on 27 June. The conference aims to highlight the attractiveness of Egypt's capital markets and offer tips to investment houses about significant new investment opportunities in Egypt.

Among the key business, banking and government officials present at the conference will be Egypt's Minister of Finance, Mohamed El-Gharib, the Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, the chairman of the Capital Markets Authority and the National Bank of Egypt.

Nearly 150 delegates will attend the conference, representing debt and equity investors, senior members of investment houses and representatives of multinational companies actively doing business in Egypt. The event is co-sponsored by Merrill Lynch International.

Beverage sale

AFTER rejecting two bids for acquiring a majority stake of its equity, Al-Ahram Beverages Company (ABC) offered 30 per cent of its shares for public subscription through the stock exchange this week.

The offering, which is likely to be increased, is comprised of 1.35 million shares to be divided equally among individuals, financial institutions and the company's Employee Shareholders' Association. The shares are offered at LE67 each, with the minimum purchase of 25 shares per lot. The offering will last for six working days until 2 July.

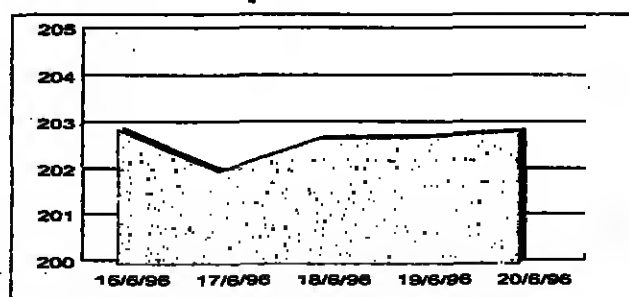
The Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema (HCHTC), ABC's owner, had received purchase bids in February from two Egyptian consortiums, the first headed by the Holding Company for Food Industries. The HCHTC consortium offered to buy 90 per cent of ABC for cash. The second bid was submitted by a group of investors including the Egyptian Finance Company, and sought to acquire 70 per cent of ABC on a joint cash-lease basis.

Mohamed Bakier, head of the HCHTC's privatisation unit, noted that members of the committee examined the two bids, but rejected them as "they were not up to par."

He explained that while this shift in the company's plan is in line with the government's policy to encourage small investors, there is potentially a major stock buy-out to an anchor investor in the future. While the offering will be co-managed by the HCHTC and the Bank of Alexandria's Investment Trustees Department, three brokerage companies will be receiving the subscription orders.

ABC, the sole producer of beer in Egypt, has a paid-in capital of LE90 million. It posted after-tax profits of LE31.62 million for the first half of fiscal 1995-1996, compared to LE42.96 million for all of fiscal 1994-1995.

Market report



Trading high, feeling low

FUELLED by a wave of both existing and potential share offerings of public sector companies, trading on the stock exchange witnessed a turn-around after several weeks of decline. While the General Market Index gained only 0.02 points to close at 202.87, the volume of transactions pushed upwards to reach LE126.27 compared to LE75.1 million the week before.

Despite the surge in trading, the manufacturing sector's index slipped by 0.74 points to level off at 260.59 points, with the shares of the Alexandria Portland Cement Company dropping by LE3.75 to close at LE384.25. Shares of the North Cairo Mills Company also fell in value, losing LE3 per share to close at LE80.50. Still waiting for an anchor investor, the General Company for Ceramics and Porcelain (Chini) lost LE1.5 to end at LE20 per share while the Egyptian Starch and Glucose Manufacturing Company recorded the highest increase in share value. The company's shares rocketed up by 250 per cent of their opening price to close at LE35. And, trading LE21.31 million in shares, the Universal Adhesive Company cornered 16.8 per cent of the total market transactions, gaining LE2.47 to close at LE40.

The index for the financial and real estate sector witnessed a moderate increase, closing 1.56 points higher than when it opened at 207.79 points. Shares of the Misr International Bank (MIBank) gained LE18.5 per share to close at LE320 while those of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) crept up by LE2.5 to close at LE441.5. Trading 828,900 shares on the market, the Egyptian-Arab Bank cornered 25.70 per cent of the total market transactions and closed at LE18.15 after opening at LE17 the beginning of the week. Shares of the National Société Générale Bank lost LE10 to close at LE390. The market's biggest loser, however, were housing bonds 2012/97, which lost 9.52 per cent of their value to close at LE76.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

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Ibrahim Nafie



To summit up

With his hackles up about the communiqué issued by the Cairo Arab Summit earlier this week, Netanyahu has irrefutably proven that peace, when defined in Israeli terms, is meant to be a facade and self-serving. "Israel has made it clear that it would not accept any dictates or forcing of results before negotiations were completed," said Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

In a meeting with Netanyahu on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher all but gave the green light for the continuation of this train of thought — and action, by stating that there should be no "pre-conditions". At least on the part of the Arabs. Israel, it seems, feels free to impose the condition of no pre-conditions, in effect negating all that was achieved in the 1991 Madrid talks.

If Israel finds the land-for-peace principle so problematic, then does it also find the Madrid agreement equally "incompatible with peace negotiations"? This principle was, after all, the premise of the Madrid talks and the basis for any future negotiations. Is Clinton so eager for votes that he is willing to kow-tow before Netanyahu and negate the strides that have been made so far?

Christopher added that he is seeking concrete reassurances from Netanyahu that the Israeli prime minister plans to honour existing agreements. Netanyahu, however, is balking on the Hebron withdrawal, rejecting the return of the Golan, encouraging the expansion of settlements and dodging having to meet with Arafat while, at the same time, pressing him to crack down on militants. In short, he is violating the spirit, body and text of all agreements reached to date.

Whatever Israel and the US may think about the recent Arab summit, its real outcome was to prove that the Arabs are not willing to concede to unreasonable Israeli demands. A peace dictated solely by Netanyahu will neither be successful nor provide Israel with the security it seeks. The sooner Netanyahu and the US realise that the shoe is now also on the other foot, the sooner both sides can walk together to the negotiating table. Until then, the Arab world is putting its foot down.

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office

AL-AHRAH, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephone: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20183-93346 Fax: 5786136/5786433

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghann, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg. Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202) 737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghann, Al-Ahram Office, 39th FL, Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212) 972-6440; Tel. ex: 497 9426 (TT ULL); Fax: (212) 286 0285.
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Russia
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Canada

Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd. West Suite 2410, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514) 876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 7825/514 876 7825.

United Kingdom

London: Amr Abdel-Samir, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France

Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (31 57) 72706; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (31 428) 93963.

Germany

Frankfurt: Abdou Moubasher, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt; Tel: (069) 9714389 (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729771.

Austria

Vienna: Mustafa Abdallah, 2331 Voserndorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/69405; Telex: 13 7724 GIGI A; Telefax: 694085.

Greece

Athens: Samir Abdallah, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonos 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. Fax: 3634503.

Japan

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A case for concerted action

The Cairo Arab Summit marks the emergence of a new sense of realism among Arab states, writes Ibrahim Nafie



"Before us is a new spirit for joint Arab action, launched by the summit and announced to the entire world." In his final address to the Arab summit meeting President Hosni Mubarak succinctly summarised why international political observers and analysts, convinced that the interests of Arab regimes had diverged too far, were taken by surprise by the summit.

While the Likud election victory, the portentous statements and threats uttered by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's new prime minister, and the even more ominous and extremist statements of generals Sharon and Ezer, gave impetus to the convening of the summit, the fact remains that even before the new developments in Israel there was a pressing need to formulate a new Arab agenda.

Arab leaders meeting at the summit faced several challenges. They had to determine mechanisms capable of establishing healthy inter-Arab relations that would recognise differences in national interests while at the same time working towards achieving higher Arab interests in terms of security, development and the restoration of Arab rights. The summit also had to devise strategies for dealing with the new Israeli government without reverting to the climate of war, and for combating Israel's monopoly of influence in the West. The third challenge faced by the summit involved the nature of relations with other countries in the region, notably Iran, Turkey and nations in the Horn of Africa.

The final communiqué of the Cairo Arab Summit amply illustrates that it rose to the challenges it faced. Inter-Arab relations are to be founded on internationally recognised principles of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations and on a respect for national sovereignty and control

over national resources. Preliminary agreement has been reached on establishing an Arab Court of Justice, and on developing a crisis management mechanism within the Arab League capable of preventing, containing and resolving inter-Arab disputes.

This recognition of the legitimacy of the Arab nation-state and its right to resolve conflicts with other Arab nations through recognised channels and treaties does not, however, negate the fact that the Arabs have high aspirations and interests that can and should be pursued. Some of these interests relate to questions of regional and national defence while others relate to joint Arab development, and more precisely, to facilitating the activity of institutions promoting Arab economic cooperation. The issue, after all, is no longer how to resist the hegemony of a merciless world economic order but how to build our own economies and manage relations with the international economic order.

Dealing with developments in Israel, which constituted the initial impetus for the summit, was no less complex. Indeed there were three schools of thought on the subject. The most prevalent was that Netanyahu intends to bring the carefully constructed edifice of the peace process tumbling down on everybody's head. According to the proponents of this view Netanyahu's notorious ideology, drawn from the traditional Likud creed and his connections to even more right-wing extremist elements in Israel, threatens to propel the region back to the brink of war.

The second school of thought asserts the opposite, allocating little if any weight to Netanyahu's campaign statements, made largely for local consumption. Instead, they emphasise de facto realities: the creation of a National Palestinian Authority on Palestinian land, with a president who is received around the world as a visiting head of state and with a trained military force of 30,000, larger than any fighting force in the history of the Palestinian struggle. Any Israeli regime that seeks to impose its control once more over liberated Palestinian territory, and turn the clock back to before the Oslo Accord, would incur insupportable costs. The peace Israel has been able to obtain so far has, after all, brought it the greatest period of economic growth in its history. Foreign investments have exceeded \$2 billion a year, annual economic growth has topped 7 per cent and more than 100 nations have opened their doors to Israeli commerce. Netanyahu cannot throw all this away, whatever ideological justifications he may offer. Nor can he afford to jettison agreements that had the backing of the US and other major world powers.

The third school of thought is more complex. The new Likud government, it holds, does not have to act immediately. It can tout peace in form, yet in practice work to obstruct the implementation of all the agreements that have been reached to date. It can make demands that are impossible to meet. It

can manoeuvre to gain time on the pretext that it is awaiting the outcome of the American elections. It can continue to stall in the hopes that it might capitalise on rifts in the Arab ranks. After all the Likud has its natural allies among the Arabs — those, who by their suicide terrorist operations helped bring the Likud to power in the first place. Netanyahu only needs a few more such acts for him to renege on Israel's commitments and gain the sympathy of the world at the same time.

The summit treated the issue of relations with Israel cool-headedly, reaffirming the Arab will to proceed with the peaceful negotiating process, while steadfastly promoting Arab demands and the Arab conception of peace. It has thus passed the ball into the Israeli court, demanding clarification of Israeli intentions on specific issues. It is now up to Israel to demonstrate its commitment to agreements that have been reached with regards to Hebron, the redeployment of Israeli forces, the creation of a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, the preservation of the status of Old City House in Jerusalem, the resumption of negotiations over the final settlement of the Palestinian issue and the status of Jerusalem, and the resumption of negotiations with Syria and Lebanon.

The above are the fruits of the Cairo Arab Summit. There were no idle threats, no brinkmanship, no sabre-rattling. The purpose was simply to remind Israel, the international community in general and the US specifically, of the need to abide by their commitments. For their part, the Arabs will greet every step forward by Israel with a comparable step forward and every step backward with a similar step backwards. If others choose to renege on their commitments, they can hardly blame the Arabs for doing the same in response.

Normalisation and boycott

The Cairo summit placed the question of the normalisation of relations with Israel in a new context. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the issue

Although the final communiqué issued by the pan-Arab summit held in Cairo early last week described peace with Israel as a strategic option for the Arabs, it nevertheless made the normalisation of relations with Israel contingent on progress in the peace process. But given that genuine peace cannot be achieved without normalisation, it is hard to see how this strategic option can be implemented if the peace process and, with it, normalisation, grinds to a halt as a result of Netanyahu's intransigence.

It is somewhat ironic that the Arabs, who have for so long regarded Israel as a foreign and hostile body implanted in their midst, should now be willing to make peace with Israel their frame of reference. This shift was triggered by the series of "no's" pronounced by Netanyahu: "no" to the restoration of the Golan to Syria, "no" to a sovereign Palestinian state, "no" to relinquishing Israel's exclusive sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem, "no" to the exchange of land for peace — in short, "no" to Resolution 242, the cornerstone of the entire peace process.

Eveo from the point of view of the Arab rejectionists who believe that peace with Israel is impossible, it makes sense to shift the blame for the failure to achieve regional peace onto Israel's shoulders, instead of having the Arabs bear the brunt of international reprobation. Indeed, there could eventually be a tactical rapprochement between moderate Arab regimes and rejectionist trends, albeit for contradictory strategic aims, with the former trying to induce the Netanyahu government into resuming the peace process and the latter hoping to prove that peace is impossible.

One issue on which the two sides are unlikely to agree, however, is that of normalisation, which was addressed by the summit

as a process somehow distinct from the notion of peace. It is hard to see how measures to restrain and downplay normalisation in response to pressures emanating not only from the rejectionists but from wide sections of Arab society could be made compatible with a pan-Arab consensus that peace is the only strategic option. Traditionally, Arab regimes have made no distinction between Israeli political parties or government. This attitude is a carry-over from the period when Arab regimes challenged Israel's right to exist, limited their dealings with it to military conflict and imposed a total boycott against it, a period which was marked by a series of Arab, not Israeli, "no's".

As recently as the last Israeli elections, the official Arab position was that there was no difference between Labour and Likud. True, the Peres government's incursion into Lebanon encouraged the view that the policies of Labour were as unsavoury as those of Likud. But if placing Labour and Likud in the same basket was useful at the time in that it exposed Peres' double standards, this attitude can now be counter-productive in that it can develop a certain complacency towards Netanyahu, and a belief that one should not be overly alarmed by his extremist statements. In fact, the summit was a tacit admission by Arab regimes that they can no longer afford not to make distinctions between different Israeli governments.

Netanyahu's reaction to the summit proves that the moderate line it adopted was correct. Unable to justify his intractability by projecting it as a reaction to Arab "hysteria", he has tried to justify it by accusing the Arabs of attempting to "impose things and dictate preconditions in a way that threatens Israel's security." By resorting to arguments totally lacking in credibility, he risks alienating not only international public opinion, but possibly also the American administration, and perhaps even the 50 per cent of the Israeli electorate who voted for Peres.

Consistent with the strategy put forward by the summit, the Arabs have every interest in trying to isolate Netanyahu inside Israel itself. To that end, they should cultivate the anti-Likud forces in Israel, particularly those who uphold the right of the Palestinian people to statehood, the recognition of Jerusalem as capital of both Israel and Palestine, the freezing of new settlements and the restoration of the Golan to Syria.

This entails adopting a new approach that neither rejects nor embraces Israel as an indivisible whole, but deals with it as an aggregate of distinct forces, not only at the official government level but even at the popular political level. It also entails intensifying relations with Israel in certain fields while freezing them in others. For example, the Arabs could suspend the economic summit scheduled to be held in Cairo for next November, on the grounds that progress on the multilateral track is inconceivable as long as the bilateral track remains blocked. In other words, the Arabs should pursue a new, imaginative, policy that would combine elements of normalisation and of boycott at one and the same time.

There is no doubt that the summit's moderate, low-key tone has exposed Netanyahu's intransigence as a source of potential instability likely to degenerate into violence and terrorism throughout the region. Still, it is a tone that, though appealing to the international community, is unlikely to sit well with substantial sections of Arab public opinion. After all, there is a very thin line between an Arab strategy aimed at isolating Netanyahu inside Israel, and one that could backfire and end up serving Netanyahu's strategy.

Law and practice

By Naguib Mahfouz

I remember how happy we were when, in the early days of the 1952 Revolution the law covering authors' copyright was issued. It was quickly discovered, though, that the only way to get people to respect the provisions of the law was to go to court, with the result that things remained very much as they had before the issuing of the new copyright legislation.

The copyright law applying specifically to public performances of an author's work, if I remember correctly, was issued during Fathi Radwan's term as minister of culture. He was followed in the post by Dr Abdel-Qader Hatem. Hatem, after a lot of petitioning, ordered State Television to pay fees to authors, playwrights, screenplay writers etc, for the transmission of any of their works on the small screen. State Television, though, arguing that they needed a new accounting system in place before they could comply with the new ruling, asked for a postponement. The result, unsurprisingly, is that to this day writers have yet to receive a penny from State Television. During the same period the French Association of Author's Copyright would regularly send statements and cheques covering fees applicable for the screening of films based on writer's works in North Africa. Since independence, though, the countries of North Africa have stopped paying such fees.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmany.



The Press This Week Summit successes

Al-Ahram: "The Arab summit is not an automatic reaction to the advent of Netanyahu and the extreme right to government in Israel. The need for a summit existed before their victory, but the developments in the Israeli position and the international arena hastened its convening. This is in order to work out a joint Arab stance towards what is happening, specifically in Israel and more generally in the Arab world and the world at large." (Ibrahim Nafie, 22 June)

Akbar El-Yomi: "Until writing these lines, Arab-Arab relations do not encourage one to believe that the just, comprehensive and lasting peace the Arabs hope for is at hand. The only hope lies with the summit meeting to be held in Cairo today, not as a reply to Netanyahu's threats, which are not worthy of a reply, but for the more important objective — bringing about a rapprochement between all the Arab sides participating in the summit." (Ibrahim Saeed, 22 June)

October: "An objective analysis of the situation in the Arab world leads us to believe that this summit is just a beginning — an important beginning to re-affirm Arab certitude in the necessity to meet and unify efforts. We do not expect it to achieve everything at once, but hope it will lay the foundation for the continuation of Arab meetings in the future. It ushers in a new era where the gap between words and deeds will be bridged." (Ragab El-Banna, 23 June)

Al-Wafed: "If the Cairo summit reaches only one decision — to hold an Arab summit once or twice a year at fixed times — this will be the greatest achievement accomplished by an Arab summit since the establishment of the Arab League. It will be a big blow to those who bet on the death of the Arab nation and the dissolution of the Arab League in preparation for the farce of Middle Easternism as advocated by the US on behalf of Israel." (Gamal Badawi, 23 June)

Al-Akhar: "The Cairo summit, which emanates from a desire to achieve a just comprehensive peace and an answer to the threats posed by Israeli ambitions, is also a good opportunity for Israel's new politicians to demonstrate genuine intentions to live in peace in the region on the basis of land for peace." (Galal Dawidar, 23 June)

Rose El-Youssefi: "Besides the summit's noble aim to confront Israeli anti-peace policies, it has other issues to discuss just as important. At the top of the list is the creation of an Arab nation with a will of its own." (Mahmoud El-Tohami, 24 June)

Al-Ahram: "As President Mubarak has said, there should be no compromises in the search for peace — no side has the right to choose certain issues and shelve others. This should be clearly underlined to the Likud government by the Arabs from the very start... It is particularly important as it comes at a time when the US is dancing to the tune of the Jewish lobby, and it is difficult to distinguish between the positions of the American administration and those of the Israeli government." (Salama Ahmed Salama, 24 June)

Al-Arabi: "In the American point of view, Egypt should now be punished or warned to stop it from pursuing the unification of Arab ranks and aligning Arab stances even at the minimum level. But, US threats are only a manifestation of anxiety and fear rather than a real show of power... If we recognise Egypt's true historical weight in the region we would not hesitate to dismiss US blackmail and threats... Egypt is not a banana republic and will never be an extension of the US administration in the Middle East." (Abdallah El-Simawi, 24 June)

Al-Gomhuria: "Sense of responsibility has triumphed over all else — and the summit came about... The Arab leaders have upheld principle and law in defence of honour and land, disregarding the imbalance of power and military superiority, nuclear or otherwise. They have met the challenge... without hesitation or fear." (Mahfouz El-Ansari, 22 June)

Al-Shaab: "The Israeli-American anxiety at the Arab summit is a healthy sign. It is an indication that this is a right step on the right track... If the Arabs remain determined to uphold a unified political stance, freeze normalisation and rebuild their military and economic power, all American manoeuvres and Israeli provocation (along with their obstinate refusal to recognise Arab rights) would be absolutely worthless..." (Magdi Hussein, 25 June)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



I sought to portray Boris Yeltsin laughing, not out of arrogance but from a kind of self-satisfaction. The spherical cheeks almost obscure his mouth. Yeltsin's features are all rounded. His constantly joyful expression seems more fitting for a schoolboy who has just succeeded in passing an exam than a president seeking re-election in difficult circumstances.

*Kuluma...
*Al-Wathania...
*Layla...
*Mourid...
*Egyptian Book...

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Tailored for whom?

The announcement of the Netanyahu government's programme in the document entitled "The General Guidelines of Israeli Policy" left Arab states meeting at the Cairo summit with one of two alternatives: either they were to believe every word about the expansion of settlements, the refusal to negotiate the future of Jerusalem, the non-withdrawal from the Golan Heights and abandoning the land-for-peace formula, in which case the summit would have to announce the refusal of Arabs to negotiate further and decrease the suspension of normalisation, or else they could reaffirm their own position, i.e. a commitment to a just peace based on the Madrid and Oslo agreements and UN resolutions.

Israel would, almost certainly, have preferred the summit to go for the first option, which would have given it an excuse to abandon the peace process and renege on commitments already made. By calling on Israel to continue negotiating within the framework provided by the Madrid text while at the same time reserving the right of the Arabs to revise their positions in the event of Israel wiggling out of earlier commitments, the ball has been sent firmly back into Netanyahu's court.

The Netanyahu government now has a period of grace in which to revise its position, which could extend beyond September, beyond even the US elections. It is a breathing space that the US administration would do well to utilise in formulating positions more appropriate to a co-sponsor of peace.

Washington's attitude towards the convening of the Arab summit certainly smacked of malice. Not only were demands voiced in American circles that Arab leaders continue with normalisation procedures, reports were spread of Egypt's purported acquisition of Korean missiles. And it is entirely incidental that the US campaign to prevent Boutros Boutros-Ghali from running for a second term as UN secretary-general should have peaked during the summit?

The US administration, it would seem, had elected to play into the hands of Netanyahu's government and to further those Israeli aims directly opposed to the peace process. Interestingly enough, the US position could not have been in greater contrast to the positions adopted by the European Union, Russia and China, each of which expressed support for the summit's efforts to strengthen peace and security in the region and reaffirm the Madrid conference as the frame of reference for continued negotiations.

Given the American stand it is unclear what the purpose of Warren Christopher's visit to Israel and Egypt could be. But if the American secretary of state is simply seeking to clarify the situation there are a number of questions he should answer with regard to the radical changes in Israeli policy towards peace that have taken place since Likud's election victory.

It is not enough for Washington to ask Arab states to show patience and not to slow down normalisation. Christopher must inform us where America stands now that the Arab states have complied with all its requests. We must know whether the US administration intends to tailor its position according to Netanyahu's measurements, or whether the US will endeavour to persuade Netanyahu to fit his government's position into the principles and commitments stipulated by Madrid and the peace agreements.



To move from rhetoric to action

El-Sayed Yassin examines the policy guidelines that emerged from the resolutions of the Arab summit and wonders what concrete proposals will emerge from this meeting of "singular significance", one that has revived the possibility of collective Arab action

It is no exaggeration to claim that the Cairo summit constituted the revival of collective Arab action. The Gulf War, combined with subsequent events, drastically impaired such action and split the Arab nation into a patchwork of individual states each pursuing a motley assortment of policies towards Israel. Naturally this position undermined the possibility of the emergence of a cohesive Arab front.

Recently, both within the Arab world and abroad, doubts have been sounded about the continuing relevance of Arab nationalism. Such doubts are almost invariably accompanied by claims that Egypt's role within the region will gradually fade into insignificance, especially in a situation where progress is made along the Syrian-Lebanese track. Yet the very fact that the summit was convened in Cairo, largely as a result of the tireless efforts of President Mubarak, serves not only to highlight Egypt's continuing regional importance but underlines the need for a streamlining of policies more conducive to Arab solidarity. Little wonder therefore that the opening phrases of the final statement of the Cairo summit read as follows:

"In response to the hopes and aspirations of the Arab nation, the belief in a common destiny, the brotherly bonds between Arabs, awareness of the responsibilities imposed by the present stage in the Middle East peace process, Arab leaders met to study the new developments in the region, to revive Arab

collective action, to intensify and enhance the effectiveness of consultation, coordination and cooperation between Arab countries for reviving and reuniting the nation, to build up solidarity as the means for realising the principles and objectives of Arab collective action, to utilise its resources for safeguarding the interests of the nation, recover its usurped rights, and consolidate efforts for the realisation of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

These opening phrases reassert an Arab nationalism that many commentators thought had been swept aside by the tide of "Middle Easternism" and the lure of Israeli promises of economic prosperity.

The resolutions adopted by the Cairo summit, even when they sound like messages addressed to the international community at large, appear to have finally settled a number of issues. Certainly the resolutions signal a determination on the part of Arab states to formulate a national strategy. President Mubarak was entrusted with overseeing the follow-up to resolutions and the convening of a second summit.

The resolutions also sent a decisive message to Israel vis-a-vis the perimeters of the kind of peace envisioned by Arabs. Israel is expected to withdraw from all occupied Arab lands, including Palestinian territory and the Arab section of Jerusalem, and the Palestinians must be enabled to exercise their right to self-determination. Israel has thus

been given notice that should it decide to renege on any of the principles it had earlier agreed then Arab states will be forced to reconsider the steps already taken towards establishing peace with Israel.

The resolutions produced by the Cairo summit had a three-part focus. Israel was asked to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to place its nuclear facilities under the international inspection system and to consider the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction. These requests were made within the context of the emphasis on "consolidating overall Arab security vis-a-vis the challenges which threaten the sovereignty of the Arab states and the integrity of Arab land and Arab natural resources, since the security of the Arab nation as an indivisible whole is inseparable from the national security of each individual Arab state."

In addition to Israel the summit also sent out strong messages to both Iran and Turkey. Iran was urged to refrain from interfering in the domestic affairs of Arab countries while Turkey was asked to reconsider arrangements with Israel which might negatively affect Turkish-Arab relations.

Summit resolutions distinguished between terrorism, rampant in certain Arab states, and legitimate resistance to occupation, condemning the former and exhorting the international community to unite in combating the phenomenon.

The successful implementation of the summit resolutions, addressed to the international community, to neighbouring countries, and to Israel, depends, of course, on ensuring that mechanisms are in place capable of facilitating collective Arab action. In other words, we need to formulate a national Arab strategy capable of translating the policy guidelines outlined by the summit into decisive Arab policies and stances. We need to work tirelessly to persuade the US to moderate its bias towards Israel. It is this bias, expressed in terms of military, security and technological agreements, which guarantees Israel's superiority over the Arab countries collectively, and which underwrites Israel's expansionist schemes and its determination to monopolise its position as a regional nuclear power regardless of the threat such a monopoly poses to Arab national security.

Israel has, in the past, shown itself peculiarly adept at capitalising on the differences between Arab states, driving wedges between Arab countries with the intention of promoting discord. Israel's newly elected prime minister has spared little time in making his own position clear. He early substituted security for land in his oath of office, a move which is a clear subversion of the "land for peace" formula.

The Arab summit, in short, addressed major issues, producing guidelines that must be translated, sooner rather than later, into coherent policies. High on the agenda, fol-

lowing the summit, are the following items in need of further definition: the Arab concept of peace; the reformulation of concepts of national security; improving the effectiveness of the mechanisms for collective Arab action; promoting economic development; renewing relations with neighbouring countries, particularly with Iran and Turkey; the lifting of sanctions against Iraq and Libya and the refusal to tolerate any attempts to partition Iraq.

The summit, however, did not stop at the issue of resolutions providing the guidelines for later, decisive policies. It strayed, too, into the domain of effective action. Thus the summit approved the establishment of an Arab court of justice, the drawing of a code of honour for security and cooperation in the Arab region, the establishment of a mechanism appended to the Arab League for the prevention, management and settlement of disputes between Arab countries.

The Arab summit constituted an effective effort to revivify Arab nationalism. It provided a mechanism for streamlining policies and positions in a manner designed to improve coordination, an essential step if the Arabs are to successfully address the challenges that will come with the new century.

The future will no doubt prove the singular significance of this Arab summit meeting, that is if the Arab countries succeed in effecting a breakthrough from the realm of rhetoric to that of action.

So very many shades of grey

The dilemmas facing the Arab World may well be ill-defined, writes Lutfi El-Kholi, but they all arise from a single site — relations with Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict, however, is not a static entity. It changes, and not always for the worse

Any reading of the current state of the Arab world would be deficient if it took into account only internal experience in terms of history, current realities, systems of government and latent potential. A thorough analysis must examine the dialectical relationship of the Arab world with the world around it.

This dialectic, with its advantages and disadvantages, its moments of tension and accommodation, operates within the framework of the economic, social and political entity that has come to be known as the Middle East, a region that contains many non-Arab nationalities and political entities. Within this region the Arab world — the cradle of mankind's three revealed religions — occupies a total land area of some 14 million square kilometres, with a population of over 230 million people.

The dialectic also functions at the global level, in which the Arab world, both historically and contemporaneously, lies at the strategic crossroads of civilisation and of communications between Asia, Africa and Europe. It is also the repository of 60 per cent of the world's known petroleum reserves. At the same time it is the focus of numerous regional conflicts that have international ramifications, most significantly the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Kurdish-Turkish dispute.

Since the advent of the nineties the Arab world has displayed novel characteristics, most significant among which is the increasing degree of mutual influence, in terms of quantity, quality and mechanisms of influence, between the Arab and external worlds, both within the Middle East and abroad. The astounding escalation in the breadth, pace and profundity of the scope of interchange between home and abroad witnessed during this decade renders the dialectical relationship between the Arab world and other areas more vital than ever before.

Unprecedented political, economic, technological, informational and strategic developments are transforming the world into a "global village", giving rise to a gamut of issues that the Arab world has never had to contend with before, certainly not at this level of intricacy and complexity. Questions of political and economic independence, national and regional security, the nature and quality of development, Arab national identity and Arab unity now pose themselves against the backdrop of new and unfamiliar givens which prevalent Arab political ideology and activity have yet to take into account.

If we are to formulate a valid, forward-looking conception for a new pan-Arab vision it must be founded upon a critical, concrete analysis of the unprecedentedly complex and intricate dynamics of interchange between the Arab world and the world around it. Only when we dispel the fog that envelops this relatively grey area in Arab thought and action will we be able to evolve the effective policies and means — within the limits of our available and potential abilities — to seriously turn these dynamics to our advantage.

Within this grey area the question which surfaces most insistently is how the Arab world, in the midst of

the new circumstances before it, is to relate to Israel which, lying outside the political, cultural and historical bounds of pan-Arab identity, has, since the 1940s, constituted a primary, if not the primary focus of challenge for the Arab nation.

The problem arises simply because Israel does not lie outside the territorial bounds that circumscribe the Arab world. Indeed, it has occupied an area within its very heart: Palestine. This geo-strategic factor has lent the Arab-Israeli conflict, since its beginnings, a particular dynamic. It has created a conflict that is simultaneously internal and external for both the Arab world and its composite nation-states as well as for Israel and international Zionism.

Since it erupted in the wake of WWII, the Arab-Israeli conflict, with its regional-international dimensions, has essentially revolved around the attempt of both sides to win political and strategic advantages, with recourse primarily to military force. The objective of the Arabs was to extricate Israel entirely from the Arab world, while Israel's objective was to entrench and guarantee the existence of the state and its Zionist project, which comprised the entire land of Palestine within the boundaries of the Arab world. Neither side, after resorting to all the military capacities at their disposal in successive full-scale wars, has been able to achieve its objective.

It is not my purpose here to review and analyse the course of the Arab-Israeli struggle. Rather, I present it here in light of the fact that, since the nineties and nearly 12 years after the Camp David Peace Accord, the Arab-Israeli struggle has entered that new and unfamiliar foggy area that obscures the boundaries of the Arab world. This development began with the 1991 Madrid conference which precipitated the series of bilateral and multilateral negotiations that led to the Wadi Araba and Oslo Agreements and, eventually, to the establishment for the first time of a Palestinian National Authority in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

In this murky region of unprecedented give and take between the inside and outside, the peace process has frozen, if not ended, the recourse to open warfare between the two sides. The conflict is now being conducted through the channels of peaceful negotiations, particularly now that Syria has joined the negotiating table. The ramifications of that process, within both the Arab world and Israel, has broadened as a result of the normalisation of diplomatic and commercial relations with a number of Arab states which are not immediate participants in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Sharp divisions have arisen within the Arab world over the value and timing of agreements concluded with Israel, particularly by the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Maghreb Union. Forces within both the Arab and Zionist entities, generally described as "terrorists", have begun to resort to violent acts against this new situation and sharp social and political rifts are cleaving present-day political entities.

In Lebanon and Jordan, for example, the structures of the forces of the regime and the opposition are undergoing radical alterations. More pertinently, the May 1996 elections in Israel brought to the fore the right-wing Likud forces which are trying to ply the peace process towards the goal of traditional Zionism, the greater Israel that was failed to bring. Moreover, the Labour Party, which fell by only a small majority and which had originally embarked on the peace process along the conditions set in Madrid, had, in its final days of power, reintroduced the terminology of war. Its massive assault upon Lebanon, bombing urban infrastructure and murdering thousands of civilians on the pretext that it was targeting the bases of Hizbollah, the most formidable opponent of the peace process, opened the path to the recourse to arms as the forces in the Middle East realign themselves.

With the rise of the Likud, therefore, the potential for major military confrontation has become more tangible. Yet it remains unlikely that such engagements will escalate to the level of open warfare, since it is no longer within the capacity or interests of either side to risk waging full-scale battle under current regional and international circumstances.

Does this new development in the "settlement-cum-conflict" mean that the political settlement has reached its terminus or that it is back-sliding towards the brink of war? Most probably not.

It is possible to define certain boundaries of the grey area that the peace process has entered. One end is defined by the Arab and Israeli resolve, shared by most neighbouring countries and influential international forces, notably the US and the European Union, to prevent the peace process from disintegrating into a full-scale Arab-Israeli war.

The other is constituted by the capacity of both sides to exploit the troubled and agitated circumstances of the other. For the Arabs this could mean building on their ability to exploit the divisions over the process that have rent Israeli society. For Israel this might involve exploiting the current state of Arab disintegration, attempting to abort efforts at building a new Arab resolve with regard to Israel and undermining the mechanisms through which the Arabs attempt to build this resolve, starting with the Cairo summit of June 1996, the first full scale summit to be held since the Gulf War.

At the international level, with the UK, France and Germany to the north, and with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Japan, China, etc. in the south and east, the labyrinthine inner-outer dialectic emerges as ever before. However, it poses itself most succinctly with regard to the US, the sole great power of the contemporary world.

American foreign policy closely focuses on the Middle East and the Arab world, on its petroleum resources, the Suez Canal, on a potentially enormous consumer market, with Israel, Iran, Iraq, on weapons of mass destruction and open and latent conflicts in-

Soapbox

Considered statements

The Cairo Arab Summit was convened at precisely the moment when it seemed one must despair of the possibility of maintaining an Arab regional system in any form. If one dared to hope at all, that hope had to be pinned to a vague, ill-defined but potentially brighter future.

In such a context simply convening the summit constituted a ray of hope. It revealed that the Arab body politic was capable of reacting with a semblance of unity to events that posed a serious threat to the Arab world.

The summit provided an arena for several meetings — e.g. between Syria and Palestine, Syria and Jordan, Egypt and Sudan — meetings that, if they did not resolve outstanding problems at least broke the psychological barriers between states that have for some time been at loggerheads.

The most important aspect of the summit, however, is embodied in the final communiqué, a document that rather than "bellowing" warnings stated, with admirable clarity, not only the Arab commitment to peace but the reasoning that lies behind that commitment. In so doing the statement underlined the fact that it is the declared intentions of the new Israeli government that are jeopardising the peace process, while at the same time setting out the perimeters of an acceptable peace.

A second feature of the summit's concluding statement and resolutions is their comprehensiveness, covering not only virtually all important Arab issues, stipulating reasonable measures to revitalise the Arab regional system.

But will summit decisions be put into practice? This is the real challenge. It is unlikely that the summit resolutions will be speedily enacted. And the burden of ensuring that they will not be brushed aside will fall most heavily on the shoulders of Egyptian diplomacy, acting in concert with the Arab League.

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of political science at Cairo University.



Ahmed Youssef

Citizen of Egypt



Mohamed Shebl assesses the legacy of Salah Abu Seif, the director who, in a career lasting over half a century, was to leave an indelible imprint on the shape of Egyptian cinema

Salah Abu Seif could, by no stretch of the imagination, be considered an ordinary, run-of-the-mill film director. His biography, and by extension his vast filmography which covers 59 years, runs like a celluloid version of the socio-political upheaval that is life in Egypt and the Middle East.

Salah Abu Seif, unlike most other film-makers, was seldom a centre of controversy except, perhaps, over his last made-for-television film *El-Sayed Kaf* (Mr K), in 1994. Some say this controversy, along with the steadfast refusal by the censorship department to okay his last script, contributed to his withdrawal from cinema. Indeed Abu Seif had himself announced, in so many words, that should his script be stopped by the censorship, then he would retire from film-making. History sometimes has a strange and ironic way of twisting events: the censorship never passed the script, and Salah Abu Seif never got to make his last film.

Salah Abu Seif started in films, or to be more precise, started working in the film business, in 1937, on one of those rare cinematic events, a movie directed by a woman. In this case, the director was Amina Mohamed, and the film carried the unlikely title *Tita Wong*. Two years later he found a job as assistant editor, and then editor in Studio Misr. The job did not keep him from writing about films in at least three publications, and directing, at first short documentaries, the first of which was *El-Mowassalat wal-Ikhtidariya* (Traffic and Alexandria) 1939, and then feature films. Abu Seif made 15 documentaries, and a total of 41 feature films, the last of which being the ill-received *El-Sayed Kaf*. The period during which Abu Seif worked as a movie correspondent and sometimes filled in as resident film critic, no doubt was of immeasurable value to him when he later commenced writing books about cinema, or co-writing his own film scripts.

Starting with his 1946 feature film *Dayman Fi Qalbi* (Always in My Heart), Salah Abu Seif seemed to be charting a course for a new Egyptian cinema, and though frequently reverting to the usual melodramas, he carved for himself the well deserved title of *sheikh el-makrejin* (Dean of Directors).

Another title that stuck with Abu Seif was "the director of realism". At first he enjoyed the title and the connotations

behind it, foremost of which was the linkage it created with the ever-growing neo-realist and cinema verité movement in Europe.

But towards the end he had grown fed up with the burden. Once, when I was interviewing Abu Seif, he gave vent to his frustrations over a bowl of ice-cream. "Can you imagine, I made *El-Bedaya* (The Beginning) and specifically wrote before the credits rolled that this was a *tahrifa* (madness) and that I considered it to be the most realistic of my films, but just the same, I can't seem to shake off this title which at times feels like an old sign on a shop."

Salah Abu Seif had reached the age where wisdom informs the sense of artistic achievement. He was becoming worried that, from a historic perspective at least, his films would be misinterpreted or at best straight-jacketed inside a neo-realist fallacy.

But was it a fallacy? Abu Seif always stated that "realism", as far as he was concerned, referred to the artist's ability to be truthful, with regards to himself and his dealings with the society in which he lived.

To be sure this definition came with experience. Some 41 films ago matters were dealt with in other terms. Scores of films, books, festivals and official appointments later, it is only natural that ideas, and philosophies, should have developed and matured. Abu Seif was an extremely sensitive film director whose filmography spanned four political administrations including dramatic swings from monarchy to socialism; from Farouk to Nasser to Sadat to Mubarak; from British occupation to Soviet and then American presence; from a personal political conviction of the justice of the socialist experience, to watching his dreams shatter, first in Cairo and then in Moscow.

Initially Abu Seif presented the audience with films that attempted to find solutions to their drama. But as the years rolled by a bitter cynicism set in, sometimes mixed with biting humour. He no longer offered solutions, but demanded that the audience either suffer along with him, or attempt to look for their own solutions. His approach to drama changed and instead of focussing on situations that, on the surface at least, affected particular people at a spe-

cific time, he sought a more encompassing drama that could be applicable anywhere at any time.

A vital turning point in his career was the 1977 film *El-Sakka Mat* (The Water-Bearer Has Died). With this film Salah Abu Seif embarked on a highly sensitive and romantic road, the metamorphosis of which would be *El-Bedaya* (The Beginning), also translated as *Satan's Empire* in several film dictionaries.

Throughout his career, Abu Seif was obsessed with both people and places. Some of his films are classics without which a thorough analysis of Egyptian or Arab cinema cannot be done. No serious film-maker or critic should have missed seeing at least four of his screen classics. These include *Bedaya Wa Nehaya* (Beginning and End) 1960, *El-Sakka Mat* (The Water-Bearer Has Died) 1977, *Shahab Imra'a* (Youth of a Woman) 1956, and *El-Osta Hassan* (Master-craftsman Hassan) 1952. To these I would personally add *El-Zawagah El-Thaniya* (The Second Wife) 1967, *Bayn El-Sama' Wal-Ard* (Between Earth and Sky) 1959 and *El-Bedaya* (The Beginning) 1986.

Salah Abu Seif has often been criticised for his heavy use of symbolism when dealing with certain themes, particularly when they involved a sexual component. Others have accused him of appealing the political administrations too heavily, tailoring his own convictions to suit the regime. Such criticisms though are grossly over-stated and lack the depth and insight needed to correctly assess a filmography of someone of the stature of Salah Abu Seif.

The facts are that Salah Abu Seif was one of the principal innovators of Arab cinema. When he started directing, Middle-Eastern cinema was simply a mutation of Hollywood at its worst. Abu Seif played a major role in giving the local cinema substance, away from the debasement it suffered at the hands of those who were just out to get fast money and willingly churned out the drivel from which we suffer to this very day.

What remains, and will always continue to remain is the belief of the masses, the film-going masses that grew with him, and those of another generation who are just beginning to discover him via video tapes and the onslaught of satellite television, that this director was deeply concerned not only with the

problems of cinema, but more so with the problems of the ordinary Egyptian citizen.

There was a heavy, uneasy feeling on that sad morning when film-makers and hordes of his students and fans gathered silently at his dignified funeral.

It is a feeling that will continue for a very long time.

Salah Abu Seif, director, born Cairo, 10 April, 1915, died Cairo, 22 June, 1996.

Dayman Fi Qalbi (Always in My Heart) 1946; *El-Montaqam* (The Avenger) 1946; *Moghamarat Anwar wa Abila* (Adventures of Anwar and Abila) 1947; *Shahab Imra'a* (The Hawk) 1949 — co-production with Italy; *El-Hob Bahdala* (Love is an Ordeal) 1950/51; *Lag Yom Ya Zalem* (Your Day Will Come) 1950; *El-Osta Hassan* (Master-craftsman Hassan) 1951/52; *Raya wa Sekina* (Raya and Sekina) 1952; *El-Wahsh* (The Monster) 1953; *Shahab Imra'a* (Youth of a Woman) 1956; *El-Fotouhah* (The Bully) 1956; *El-Wessada El-Khalil* (The Empty Pillow) 1956; *La Anam* (I Do Not Sleep) 1956; *Mogrem Fi Agazah* (A Criminal on Holiday) 1957; *El-Tariq El-Masdoq* (Dead End) 1957; *Hatha Howa El-Hobb* (This is Love) 1958; *Ana Horrah* (I am Free) 1958; *Bayn El-Sama' Wal-Ard* (Between Earth and Sky) 1959; *Lawal El-Hab* (The Burn of Love) 1959; *El-Banat Wal-Sayf* (Girls and Summer) second in a three part film 1959; *Bedaya Wa Nehaya* (Beginning and End) 1960; *La Tofti* (El-Shams (Keep the Sun's Blaze) 1961; *La Wag Leil Hobb* (No Time for Love) 1962; *Ressala Min Imra'a Maghoula* (Message from an Unknown Woman) 1962; *El-Qahira* 30 (Cairo 30) 1966; *El-Zawagah El-Thaniya* (The Second Wife) 1967; *El-Qadiya* 68 (Case 68) 1968; *Thalath Nesa'* (Three Women) 1968; *Shay on Min El-Asab* (A Touch of Suffering) 1969; *Fagr El-Islam* (The Dawn of Islam) 1970; *Hammam El-Malabill* (El-Malabill Bath House) 1972; *El-Kaddab* (The Liar) 1975; *Sana Oula Hobb* (First Love) with four other directors 1976; *Wa Sagatal Fi Bahr El-Asaf* (And She Fell in a Sea of Honey) 1976; *El-Sakka Mat* (The Water-Bearer Has Died) 1977; *El-Mogrem* (The Criminal) 1978; *El-Qadiya* (The Battle of El-Qadiya) 1986; *El-Bedaya* (The Beginning) 1986; *El-Mowaten Masri* (Citizen, Massi) 1991; *El-Sayed Kaf* (Mr. K) 1993

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Group Exhibition (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssouf El-Ghundi St, Bab El-Louk, Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun 12pm-8pm, until 27 June.
The students of the Cairo Academy, Faculty of Fine Arts, exhibit their work under the title "Old Cairo".

Maged Abdel-Razik & Fakhry Othman (Paintings)
Opera House Gallery, Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. Daily 9am-9pm, until 27 June.

Barbara Graf & Sadiyo Niederberger
Masrabiya Gallery, 8 Champs-Élysées, Downtown, Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-6pm, until 4 July.
Exhibition under the title "The Travel Kit".

Gail Abdel-Hay, Enas Shabib & Mohamed Ismail
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 18 Sidi Metwally St, near El-Attarin, Alexandria, Tel 482 1598. Until 4 July.
Photographic exhibition under the title "Alexandria 3x3".

Jilaa Rasaf, Samih El-Bahary & Lohma Zakaria
Khan El-Magharbiya Gallery, 18 El-Mansour, Mohamed St, Zamalek, Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 6pm-9pm, until 6 July.
Exhibition under the collective title "Fantasy" are the paintings of the three artists.

Pottery Exhibition
Gallery Nawa, 4 Mahmoud Abul Omayyeh St, off Haggaz St, El-Mahkemah, Heliopolis, Tel 348 0082. Daily 11am-11pm, 1-7 July.
Artisans from all over Egypt exhibit their pottery work.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhdid St, Dokki, Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St, Downtown, Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
Outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo, Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses the largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq, Tel 390 9930/3990 1520.
Daily exc Fri, 9am-6pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 3pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud El-Ghundi St, Giza, Tel 342 0598. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Makhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Giza, Daily exc Sun and Mon, 10am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Makhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Riccardio Di Tre
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Morissi St, Zamalek, Tel 340 8791. 30 June, 7pm.
Starring Massimo Troisi and L. Arcana.

Les Trois Mousquetaires

French Cultural Centre, Ma-drasat El-Hoqueq El-Ferensha St, Mounira, Tel 354 7679. 30 June, 7pm.
Directed by A. Huneault, starring G. Marshall, G. Cervi and Bourvil.

Les Portes De La Nuit
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis, Tel 417 4824/417 4825. 30 June, 7pm.
Directed by M. Camé (1946), the film is a must-see classic starring Yves Montand and P. Brasseur.

Home Village
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City, 27 June, 6pm.
Directed by Seijiro Koyama (1993). One of Koyama's works, an expert in depicting social problems in highly poetic scenes. The film is about the story of a family in a village which will be submerged after the construction of a dam.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Mit Fell
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown, Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.
Diana Palace, 17 El-Ahly St, El-Madinet, Downtown, Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nazr City, Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ya Donna... Ya Gharraam (Life... My Passion)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown, Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Raxy, Raxy Sq, Heliopolis, Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nazr City, Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Abul-Dahab
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohammediya, Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm, 10pm, 11pm & 12.30am. 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

El-Loungi (The Woman)
Lido, 23 Enadadina St, Downtown, Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. With Fifi Abdon and El-Shahat Mahrout.

Ground Zero
Cosmos II, 12 Enadadina St, Downtown, Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Don Juan de Marco
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki, Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGH, MGH Grand Mall, Killya, El-Nasr St, Mendi, Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreyra II, El-Horreyra, Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Sat Hoda (Lady Hoda)
National Theatre, Ataba Sq, Tel 911 267. Daily exc Wed, 9.30pm.

El-Kharti El Wara (The Map is in Cairo)
National Theatre, as above. Thur-Sat, 9pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
Al-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza, Tel 386 3983. Daily exc Tues, 9.30pm.

Dastoor Ya Sladna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fenn Theatre, Ramses St, Tel 578 2444. Daily 10pm, Sat 8.30pm.

Norhan Wal Amir Morgan (Norhan and The Prince Morgan)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq, Tel 591 0954. Daily 6.30pm.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St, Tel 575 0761. Daily 10pm, Mon 8pm. Scripted by Mahdi Yousef, starring, and directed by, Mohamed Sobhi.

Horreya Mall, Raxy, Heliopolis.
Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Shooter
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Pochontas
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis, Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Yankee Zulu
El-Haraw, El-Haraw St, Giza, Tel 385 8338. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Beat
Ramses Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St, Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. 1 El-Horreyra, 1 El-Horreyra Mall, Raxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Copy Cat
Karam I, 75 Enadadina St, Downtown, Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza, Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Arabia, while Taher reveals his life-long pre-occupation with finding visual equivalents, at times borrowed from calligraphic principles.

6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
While You Were Sleeping
Ramses Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St, Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Seven
Cosmos II, 12 Enadadina St, Downtown, Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. The seven deadly sins are seven ways to die; starring Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt.

First Knight
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid B. dawi St, Heliopolis, Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Nine Months
Karam II, 15 Enadadina St, Downtown, Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Sudden Death
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The American President
Ramses Hilton, Corniche El-Nil St, Tel 574 7436. Daily midnight.

Fair Game
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki, Tel 335 5726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 27 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 30 June, 9pm.

Piano Recital
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihon St, Tel 354 2968. 1 July, 8pm.
Featuring pianist Samir Bayoumi Mansour in selections from Chopin, Beethoven, Liszt, Prokofiev and Scarlatti.

DANCE

Le Scala De Barcelona
Cairo International Conference Centre, Nazr City, Tel 263 4631/2. Until 6 July, 8.30pm & 11.30pm.

THEATRE

Medea
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 28-30 June, 9pm.
Based on Euripides' classic play, with a scenario by Mustafa Takalash, the Ninagwa Company, directed by Yukio Ninagwa, performs Medea.

El-Amra Tawassat (The Princess Awais)
Zaki Tawassat Hall, El-Telli Theatre, Ataba, Tel 937 94th. Daily exc Tues, 9.30pm.

El-Sat Hoda (Lady Hoda)
National Theatre, Ataba Sq, Tel 911 267. Daily exc Wed, 9.30pm.

El-Kharti El Wara (The Map is in Cairo)
National Theatre, as above. Thur-Sat, 9pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
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Arabia, while Taher reveals his life-long pre-occupation with finding visual equivalents, at times borrowed from calligraphic principles.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri

Music

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
"Talents (3)": conductor Taha Nagui; Mozart Overture, Marriage of Figaro; Beethoven Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No 3 in C minor, Op. 37; soloist Dina El-Lethy; Mozart Symphony No. 35 in D major K. 383 (Haffner); Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 16 June

How do you gender the piano? What do people feel about this thing? Pianos have been around for so long. Myth has given them a certain masculinity. Piano people love speaking of "Lions of the Piano", Liszt, Rubinstein et al. There has been only one lioness — Teresa Carreno. Virtuosi never own the piano, they are not like the violinist who always owns his own instrument. Pianists check into cities, play the piano at a concert and after it is all over turn around and leave it like a hotel bedroom.

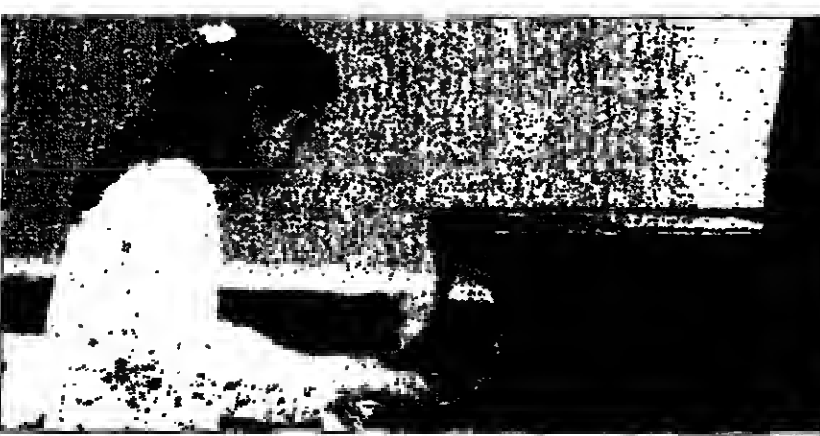
Pianos have physical emanations, malevolent, silent, Mr Black Jack in the corner. It is not there to entertain but to threaten and provoke. The piano, unlike the violin, produces no genuine, infant prodigies.

Though weighty teenagers can get away with it the instrument really needs maturity. As the piano world knows, really old players often give the most startling revelations well into their nineties. The piano will never let you down if you know its moods.

Dina El-Lethy, a pupil of the Russian pedagogue Demidov, knows all about this. She is physically frail, except for her

Something fresh

David Blake on the consolations of intensity



Dina El-Lethy

hands and wrists, both of which are strong and beefy. This all goes well for her future because she suggests a player who is intuitive, instinctive and impulsive. One who has the possibility of growth — no heavy staid-in-the-tracks academic classicism. She needs time to grow, to be watched seriously because she works — she's a little demented and her concentration carries over to an audience. They, the audience, have to work too, but as Alfred Cortot said, that is what concerts are about. Otherwise they are funeral rites.

We never quite know what El-Lethy will do next. She takes risks, makes errors and then like a light flash out

comes a phrase, a sequence, exactly coloured, mint fresh, deeply felt and realised. She is untamed. May she stay so.

She did not open this concert, conducted by Taha Nagui. He is heavy on the down beats, not exactly light on the up ones. The Figaro overture went forward energetically and with canny force. Village — out courtly.

Mozart again for the finish, the Haffner Symphony No. 35. The Nagui approach suited this music. It opened with spirited strings and strong movement, nothing thin — in fact it was meaty and inclined to be spread out for good practical enjoyment. Nothing wrong with this approach. In the an-

dante Mozart, never a heavy feeder himself, goes off into arcaic vagrant and questioning. His moods are as changeable as passing clouds. Listening time for this *allegro*, therefore, did permit something of the spirit. And then on again back to earth. The dance the ball and then the run-up to the finale. A very practical Haffner but enjoyable if you overlooked the Mozartian shadows following at the sides.

Back again to El-Lethy and the Beethoven piano concerto. Last year this player gave a strong, unselfish account of the Schumann A minor. Intimate and interior it was but with no heavily padded romanticism. Maybe El-Lethy is

هكذا من الامل

David Blake goes in in the dark and out into the light with *Anas El-Wogood*



Photos: Sherif Sorbel

Love to the crocodiles

Egypt has been around a long time, longer than the rest of us. It has produced marvels — art, paintings, pyramids, palaces — religions, empires, and calamities and a tightly knit race protected by sand, water and space, bent on survival. A recipe for immortality.

But whatever permeated from outside it was never the love of opera. As the millennia raced on, Egypt made music, sport, dance, visuals, films, singers but never opera, never the opera, the one and only.

The Cairo music world, in face of all these impediments, still has an urge for the opera, the ultimate curate's egg.

Is *Anas El-Wogood* the answer, the heir apparent or the fabulous king himself? It was written about three decades ago. Egypt was going through turbulent waters then — not times for launching a polemical opera extolling the virtues of love and tolerance. *Anas* waited. El-Shawwan died in 1993 before he saw his egg hatched and given to the operatic world.

So in '96 it comes, thanks to the stubborn determination of the Opera management and of his widow Leila El-Shawwan who wanted it to stand before an audience more or less as her husband had imagined it. The time of production is more than overdue, not least because of the break-neck speed with which music is entering the new millennium. Particularly seismic is the opera world itself. Nothing stands where it did — opera is on its head out in cyberspace and chaotic economical problems. Lucky for *Anas* that its production is given now, before the changing years close over its idiom which has already gone past.

Is it an opera? Knowing the block-like pyramidal form of most Egyptian music, even songs, it could have been a repetitious pile of brick-like constructions. It is not. El-Shawwan has melodies to give real tunes. They run along, they change shape and body and flow — they flow. So he has an area quite to himself. And the music melts into sounds of colour, is rich, is sensual, made for the theatre. In concert all these things failed to materialise. In operatic surroundings they glister and shine and have true atmosphere.

One unusual aspect of the voice parts of *Anas El-Wogood* is the pitch in which they are set. El-Shawwan seems to have a horror of expecting any of the voices to move into a high tessitura, so the poor soprano singing heroine, Ward, is kept firmly in the mezzo range. Sopranos love their higher registers; they permit colourful flights and have audience appeal. No such thing for heroine Ward. As most sopranos lack resonance in their low areas, Ward's dominance in her solos and duets is almost colourless. The same happens with the Sultan, called a baritone, but set mostly in the bass, taxing even Reda El-Wakil to stay in the depths.

So El-Shawwan, cleverly side-stepping the longeur of the naturalist Egyptian style, is more or less trapped into another limitation by the low registers he demands for all his music for the singing voice. There are too many vocal fade-outs, and this is no fault of the singers. For example, there is no tenor at all, not even an alto one in this opera.

In the second act there is a ballet for three girls, very beautifully dressed, dancing to some of the best music of the entire score. No singing voice to dampen the flow of sound, so the ballet is one of the most successful moments of the evening. It was an up-mood and brought great applause.

Does the music assist the narrative, the story? Yes, until the singers begin, and then there is a lapse of momentum. The singing never leads the scene but settles back into the rear of the sound pattern. Maybe that is where *Anas El-Wogood* shows its age. Things do not speed along in this opera but almost rest on the way while the story demands action.

Opera, say the dictionaries, besides its primal meaning of manipulating a mix of all the other arts in a public performance also means "work". Almost strife. It is a complex mass of constant confrontations. Even Monteverdi and Cavalli composed scenes, dramas. The confrontations in *Anas El-Wogood* are often handled by the orchestra alone. The people in crisis merely stand about. It is an hieratic and formal composition, neither classic nor romantic — static and removed from human contact. We cannot believe in these people as we do in Doo Giovanni until the ultimate scenes. They do not shock or astound or even solicit. The opera is like something going on behind a screen — a miracle shadow play such as they have in Indonesia and very beautiful to look at in this production.

The plot is from *A Thousand and One Nights*, telling of the love of a high-born daughter of a court official for an ordinary soldier, *Anas El-Wogood*. The official is for marrying off the daughter, Ward, to the great Sultan, or king who wants her. She, however, detests him, and that is where the trouble lies. There follows a situation concerning stolen love letters and double-crossing. Secret hands leading the lovers from ever getting together. The father — official — pushes the daughter off to the island of Philae at Aswan for a year's banishment. *Anas* runs for it. He is a good boy, a soldier, and unlike most of the others chases things that are rather more important than money and social advancement. The lovers are quite an unpretentious couple who want out of the power rat race and into marriage, love and babies.

Ward, the girl, ends up in Act III on Philae among a mixed bag of characters including an interesting emanation, the mythic, the real, the dream-like goddess Isis. Ward pines in lonely tuneless music which lies far too low for her voice so that few of the words come vividly over to the audience and do not express the key situation of three disparate religions melting into one. Ward appears to be a moon-faced dreamer, she is not. The music is not said, it is a totally different timbre to that of the first two acts which belong to the scene of the newly conquered Cairo as a Muslim centre. The music of Act III is different, that of an ancient world, the Pharaonic, having disintegrated into the Coptic and now faced with a confrontation with the Muslim. It is clear how important this fact was to El-Shawwan because it is the real core of the opera — Egypt at a time of probably chaotic change having passed through these Pharaonic Coptic states feels ap-

prehensively towards the new one. Nubia casts a mysterious shadow, almost the most ancient of all at Aswan, the seat of Nilotic myths. An area of miracles. Nubia casts a presence which produces a strange, timeless feeling heavy with the poetry of non-reality, deep and disturbing. Egypt forever changing but always the same, outside time. The ordinary measurements of existence have gone.

And so to the real heroine of the opera, Isis, her immortal self. Even today, in the time of the stone-eaters, she produces a shiver. Isis is there in this opera, far up at the top of a part of her temple on Philae, time worn golden like Wagner's Erda, immense and awesome. She hails the lesser show going on around her feet. She is Egypt, is the mystery made almost, but not quite, visible. Things evolve from things and the land of the Nile is timeless, the great metamorphosis of one thing into another by a means not warlike or hurtful, of a race tolerant and able to love.

These are holistic, scriptural words for 1996. They offer hope and some form of reason in a torn brutalised world, the era of the stone-eaters. Isis — Nile — Egypt was sung by the soprano Gihane Fayed in a truly carrying, supported voice of splendid quality — the best singing of the evening. One of the oldest rules in opera is on small parts, just small singers. Fayed merely was. An event beyond reasonable justification. She stood like a column of golden ice without any movement for nearly half an hour. But she had her eyes, and she blazed out, commanding a true, clear voice.

Anas El-Wogood had almost reached its high moment. That came when the Sultan, in the prestigious presence and voice of Reda El-Wakil, stepped out from his *baladequin* or tent or whatever it was and gave the tormented lovers his balm and blessing. The journey to salvation had been reached. Isis and the Sultan showed there is more than mere mythic Egypt, there is a practical one that gives only the mirage of myth and that is a lovely story for any era.

The last pages of *Anas* are like the trials of Tamino and

Pamina in Mozart's *Magic Flute* or the spiritual triumph of Leonora in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Like these people *Anas* and Ward, suddenly, after two acts of being themselves in shadow, become real people, touched by the inestimable blessing of love, relief and true victory. The spiritual exists to ennoble the body.

So we went in in the dark and like the two lovers came out into the light. The ending and the beginning of — is this the Opera? Can Aida go home to La Scala, Milan and leave the Cairo Opera a little space for something else?

The French team — director Michel Geis and costume and decor director Alan Roussel — saw well into the heart of this strange operatic shadow play and it is due to them the memorable feeling and message of the last act was made so clear.

The Cairo Opera Orchestra under Youssef El-Sisi did well giving force and listening pleasure to all the strange and different colourings of El-Shawwan. The chorus work, directed by Aldo Magnato, was better than usual because the chorus became part of the true myth of the life of *Anas El-Wogood*. The lighting was subtle — especially the contrast between the trio of religions and places.

The cast for 23 June was Iman Mustafa as Ward — singing very clearly, acting with simplicity —, Hossam Mustafa in the title role, sympathetic and forceful and Enad Adel as the official minister, good voice in spite of low tessitura.

The same roles on the second performance, the 24 June, were Neveen Allouba, Abdel-Wahab El-Sayed and Youssef Sabbagh. Gihane Fayed as Isis and Reda El-Wakil as Sultan did not change.

The ballet in Act II — the three girls in bronze and green — were a high light and though they have no mention at all in the programme the boys of the Crocodile Ballet — the subject of *Anas El-Wogood*'s great trial — were touching and unique. They, Isis and the Sultan, gave this miracle play its true moments of strange mythic beauty, the kernel centres of an authentic Egyptian night at the opera.

Anas El-Wogood, world premier, opera in 3 acts by Aziz El-Shawwan; Director Michel Geis; decor and costumes Alain Roussel; lighting Michel Geis and Aldo Magnato; Chorus Master Aldo Magnato; Conductor Youssef El-Sisi; Cairo Opera House, Moin Holi; 23 June



Aziz El-Shawwan

Plain Talk

The Lawrence Durrell Conference ends tomorrow. Over 100 delegates have participated and quite a number of papers have been presented. Very rarely has a writer been honoured on such a scale. The choice of Alexandria was not a chance one. The city was immortalised by Durrell in his *Alexandria Quartet*. Or perhaps, more correctly, was himself immortalised by this great Mediterranean city.

I first met Durrell in 1942 at the Anglo-Egyptian Union, an exclusive club which was on the site of the Officers' Club in Zamalek. When we met Durrell was known more as a poet than as a novelist. He had published a couple of novels, but they had not elicited much attention. It is on the *Quartet* that Durrell's fame really rests. And yet the *Quartet* did not begin to appear until 1957, and the last volume *Cleo* came out in 1961. Durrell's poetry abounds with scenes of Alexandria. For Durrell Egypt was Alexandria, although he spent quite a number of years in Cairo. But his Alexandria was an extension of Greece, memories of which came out in some of his later books. His flight from Greece created some kind of yearning, which found its realisation in Alexandria.

Alexandria became the scene of Durrell's novels. He was able to imbibe and ruminate on the city until he wrote his *Quartet* some years later. But Durrell's Alexandria was a special one. The city, for him, was there, but he was more preoccupied with its inhabitants. And yet Durrell's characters could live only in Alexandria, their very lives were shaped by the city. The genius of the place wreaked havoc with their lives and their relationships, to the extent that they became living embodiments of the city they inhabited.

In many ways, as reflected in many pages of his novels and articles, Durrell was at times unfair to Egypt. The neutral atmosphere that bothered him was exploited to the extreme, especially by the British and their allies. Plans for the Western Desert campaigns were drawn in Cairo, the wounded soldiers were rushed to Cairo for treatment and convalescence.

The last time I saw Durrell was in May 1987 in London. He was autographing his latest book "Constance" at a reception given by the publisher. The novel had first been published in 1983 and yet a whole chapter, a rather long chapter, is titled "Into Egypt", providing a kind of link with the *Quartet*. It seems that Durrell, despite what Durrell at times expressed, still lingered in his memory, continuing as a rich mine to which he would constantly return in his search for inspiration. Durrell had not aged well, I thought, and indeed he looked older than his age — he must have been 74. He was quite a different person, hither and nonchalant. Of course he was as nice to me as he always had been, but gone was the lustre and vivacity that he had always shown. I later knew why; he had just lost his daughter.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

The secret smile of Sinbad

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews some of the more significant titles to have appeared in the last month

***Kulamma Ra'aina Binan Hulwa Aqoul Ya Soud** (Whenever I See a Beautiful Girl, I Exclaim, O Soud), Said Noah. Cairo: El-Haya El-Aama Li-Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1996.

Despite, or perhaps because, of the fact that this is a first novel, it is noteworthy for its originality, particularly in the treatment of death. Celebrating death as it does — in order to tame it perhaps — the novel, nevertheless, is full of life, teeming with people who strive towards ends they rarely attain. Not really getting there, but not for want of trying.

***Al-Wathania Wal-Islam** (The Serpent and the Crescent), K. Madhu Panikar, tr Ahmed Fouad Balbaa. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 1996.

This, the last book by K. Madhu Panikar, the renowned Indian historian and statesman, is in two sections. The first section deals with the origins of African civilization, particularly the long gone civilization of the Sahara and its relationship with both Egypt and India, and also includes an examination of the political and military organisation of the ancient societies of Ghana and Mali. The second section comprises four comprehensive studies on the economic and administrative aspects of the region.

***Layla Magnouna** (A Mad Night), Mourid Barghouthi. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996.

This is the ninth poetry collection by Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouthi and brings together a number of his shorter poems written over the past three years.

***El-Ein Wa El-Ibra: Dirasa Fi Alf Laylo** (The Eye and the Needle: A Study in The Thousand and One Nights), Abdel-Fattah Keleita, tr Mustafa El-Nakhal. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyyat, 1995.

In this new study the distinguished Moroccan critic Abdel-Fattah Keleita turns his attention to Scheherazade, the narrator of the *Thousand and One Nights*, paying particular attention to the endings of the stories, while at the same time providing interesting readings on such seemingly arbitrary details as Sinbad's smile.

***Kan Wa Yakuun** (It happened, it is happening), Abdullah El-Nadim. Cairo: Dar El-Kutub Wal-Watha'iq El-Qawmiya, 1995.

One of the main propagandists of the Arabi uprising, Abdullah El-Nadim provides, in this recently reprinted book, an epilogue of sorts to the events of the 1870s and '80s. The book was written while El-Nadim was in hiding from the British authorities. It includes a debate between El-Nadim and a Frenchman on religious issues and on the political and historical differences between the East and West. First published in three volumes by El-Mahroussa Press, the second volume of the book had been unavailable



Naguib El-Rihani (second left). A precise sketch of the comedian appears in Badei Khairi's memoirs

for many years. Its reissue here is more than welcome.

***Qissat Al-Hallaj Wa Ma Gara Lahu Min Ahl Baghdad** (El-Hallaj's Story and What Befell Him at the Hands of the People of Baghdad), author un-

known, ed. Said Abdel-Fattah. Cairo: El-Haya El-Aama Li-Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1996.

Condemned to death on the charge of heresy in AH 309, the great Sufi Al-Hussein Bin Mansour Al-Hallaj left at his death more than 50 works, mostly poetry,

and tracts on meditation. All were burnt with the exception of two: his celebrated book *Al-Tawassu* and a *diwan* comprising a distillation of his meditations and Sufi sayings. After the burning the forces of the inquisition believed they had done with Al-Hallaj once and for all. El-Hallaj, though, remained a popular and revered figure, so much so that the unknown author responsible for this biography presented him as a hero. This is the first scholarly edition of the text to be published.

***Al-Abgoria** (Genius: The History of an Idea), ed Penelope Murry, tr Mohamed Abdel-Wahid. Knawit: Alam El-Ma'rifa Series, 1996.

The idea of genius, essentially an eighteenth century formulation, continues to stir controversy. The book in hand contributes to the debate with a collection of essays in 12 chapters. A number of the studies analyse the rudimentary origins of the idea in antiquity as seen in the

age of the poet as inspired madman. Other studies trace the development of the concept of genius over the centuries. While most of the examples cited are of artists working in different mediums, the writers of the studies also tackle manifestations of genius in the fields of medicine, philosophy, psychiatry and mathematics.

***Muzakirat Badei Khairi** (The Memoirs of Badei Khairi), Badei Khairi, ed Ibrahim Helmi. Cairo: The Supreme Council of Culture, 1996.

Badei Khairi (1893-1966) lived 73 years, and spent most of that time making other people laugh. His was the pen behind the celebrated comedies performed by Naguib El-Rihani, among them *Hossam wa Morcos wa Kabein* (Hassan, Morcos and Cohen) and *Talatin Yom Fi El-Sayn* (Thirty Days in Prison). Though he produced some 70 scenarios and film dialogues, Khairi's diaries have never before been published in Egypt. The Supreme Council of Culture, then, is to be thanked for at last making available these diaries, which include incisive portraits of such celebrated figures as Umm Kalthoum, Sayed Darwish, Naguib El-Rihani and Mohamed Rifaat. They are an invaluable source for anyone interested in the life of a man who, beginning as a lowly employee in a telephone company, eventually established himself as Egypt's leading writer of comedy.

School's out at last, and there are over 21 million adults across the world infected with the HIV virus which can cause AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The international response to the epidemic has included the World Health Organisation (WHO) establishing its Global Programme on AIDS. The number of people suffering from AIDS reached the 1.3 million mark late last year. Women make up over 42 per cent of the cases.



Photo: Shafiq Naguib

AIDS alert

AIDS cases increased by 25 per cent in 1995 and the disease is seriously detrimental to development, warned a recently released UN study. Nermeen El-Nawawi reports on the findings

A United Nations survey released recently revealed that there are over 21 million adults across the world infected with the HIV virus which can cause AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

The international response to the epidemic has included the World Health Organisation (WHO) establishing its Global Programme on AIDS. The number of people suffering from AIDS reached the 1.3 million mark late last year. Women make up over 42 per cent of the cases.

The UN report indicated that the worst hit regions are sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas. More than 90 per cent of HIV-infected people live in developing countries. There is a strong correlation between poverty, the lack of medical provision and AIDS. In Botswana, 18 per cent of the adult population is HIV positive, while in Zambia and Zimbabwe the figure is 17 per cent. "Comparisons between how AIDS is spread in the Middle East and other parts of the developing world could lead to some useful tips on viral epidemics," Dr Nasr El-Sayed, head of the National Programme for AIDS Prevention in Egypt's Ministry of Health, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

In sub-Saharan Africa, transmission is mostly heterosexual. Pre-natal transmission is also common. The role of injections is also important as neither properly sterilised nor disposable syringes are wide-

ly used. Between five and 40 per cent of 15- to 49-year-olds in the region are HIV positive. Among prostitutes the figure is much higher — in certain communities more than 80 per cent are infected. "AIDS is not just a medical problem, but also a social, economic and developmental one. To date, there is no cure for AIDS. Prevention is the only way to protect ourselves against AIDS," El-Sayed said.

Among Arab countries Sudan has the largest number of recorded AIDS cases — about 1,090. Djibouti has 649, Morocco 237 and Tunisia 209. In the Arab world, sexual transmission is the predominant mode of transmission, accounting for 82 per cent of the total reported cases. Twelve per cent of the cases are among drug users and pre-natal transmission is responsible for two per cent.

The Arab world is considered the region least affected by the disease in the world. In his address on World AIDS Day 1995, Dr Hussein El-Gezairi, area director of WHO for the East Mediterranean Region, said, "Arab countries are distinguished by the relatively small number of people with AIDS or those who are carriers of the AIDS virus."

The data available from the WHO's East Mediterranean Region (EMR) on high-risk groups shows a rapid progression in HIV infection, especially among prostitutes (50 per cent are HIV pos-

sitive in some countries), those suffering from other sexually transmitted diseases, drug addicts and homosexuals. Sexual transmission is now the predominant mode of HIV transmission in the EMR. The estimated total number of cases of HIV infection in the region is between 100,000 and 150,000.

Preventive measures being taken in the EMR, other than media announcements, include holding seminars and workshops. "Medical representatives from the EMR meet every six months to share experiences on successful activities applied by member states and to update their information concerning data and statistics," said El-Sayed. Yet no bilateral or multilateral treaties have been signed between countries of the region. "All we can do is increase awareness among the public. We cannot bring together all members of vulnerable risk groups to train them," El-Sayed noted. Likewise, migrant labour cannot join a preventive programme. "We target travellers and visitors to increase their awareness by having them undergo laboratory examinations for HIV and Hepatitis B and C," he added. The only risk group that goes through a preventive programme are people with sexually transmitted diseases.

El-Sayed argues that there is no relation whatsoever between tourism and the increase of the dis-

ease. "In Egypt, we have a tourism awareness programme in South Sinai, Luxor and Aswan," he said. Concerning the restrictive measures imposed by certain countries on visitors, El-Sayed does not contend that they are appropriate measures for combating the disease.

New diagnostic measures will be soon be on sale in the markets, such as the "rabbit test" and the "saliva test", both of which can be done at home. The financial cost of combating the disease in Egypt is LE5 million per year. "This cost is covered by the ministries of health, education, information, social affairs, tourism and the interior," El-Sayed said. "We now accept the AIDS patient and do not isolate him." He cited the example of a young Egyptian couple who got married three years ago although the husband was infected with AIDS. "They are a very happy couple and the wife has not caught the infection because they regularly use condoms," he told the *Weekly*.

When asked how Islam deals with HIV infection and AIDS, El-Sayed said, "Our *shari'ah* forbade the isolation of AIDS patients and abortion for AIDS-infected mothers, ordered physicians and nurses to take care of patients without any discrimination and agreed to the wife's right to get a divorce or refuse sexual relations with her husband if he is infected with AIDS."

Cooking healthy

Football player diet, low-fat diet or ultimate change in diet? Mona El-Tawil proffers the likely option and some recipes to help you along

We all share a concern over healthy cooking, whether our aim is to lose weight (which seems to be a major concern for young and old alike) or to reduce the risks of diseases such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular problems, cancer or the like. Research has indeed shown that with a healthy diet we can help get rid of the extra fat in our bodies, have more energy, feel better in general and perform more effectively in our work and daily routines. But what is a healthy diet?

We are bombarded with many different diets and words of wisdom: eat more protein, eat more carbohydrates, don't mix fruits with vegetables or rice with meat... the list goes on and on. Every day there is a new fad and a new diet that proposes to cure all ailments.

Unless you have a PhD in nutrition, it is really a challenge to sift through all the hype and get a clear understanding as to what and how to eat.

Since I don't have a PhD in nutrition, I am not going to join the bandwagon and recommend a new diet to you, but what I want to share with you is the result of my interest in nutrition due to a member of my family who suffers from diabetes and also my own interest in looking good and feeling energetic.

But what really got me started on healthy cooking was my oldest son. He came home from college during his first semester break and broke my heart because he would not eat any of the wonderful meals I had painstakingly prepared for him.

He wouldn't even touch the salad, which happened to be one of his favourites. What on earth, I wondered, could possibly be unhealthy in a salad of fresh vegetables and tomatoes? And no cereal in the morning? I just couldn't understand what was going on.

What had happened in that first crucial semester in college was that my son had joined the football team and he had to work out every day in the gym and eat certain foods that would give him energy and stamina and maintain his body in the best possible way, with lean muscle and not too much extra fat. I realised that he wouldn't eat the salad because of all the oil in the salad dressing, and that he couldn't eat cereal until we switched to non-fat milk which he could generously pour on his cereal. As for all the food I had cooked, the main course was built around meat, butter, cream and other heavy stuff.

Now, I am not going to encourage you to adopt a football player's diet, but that episode led me to try to find out what really constitutes a healthy diet and how one can cook without too many complications and restrictions and enjoy simple, tasty, nutritious and satisfying meals with family and friends.

The first thing I learned was to scrap the word "diet" from my vocabulary. A "diet" implies certain types of food that you eat for a specified amount of time, hopefully losing some weight in the process, and then going back to eating "normal" food (and probably gain all that you had lost and more). What I realised was that I had to make a commitment to change the way I eat and cook forever. The word "diet" did not fit the purpose any more and I had to find an easy way of cooking that I would not end up getting bored with. That is what I want to share with you.

We now know that eating healthy means greatly reducing the amount of fat, sugar and salt in our food, so here are some tips and techniques on how to do that and still end up with a delicious meal.

A basic staple to have in your refrigerator is a nutrient rich de-fatted chicken broth:

Remove the skin of a whole chicken. Add water to cover, and bring to boil. Skim the surface till the broth is clear. Add: chopped onion, carrot, celery. Spice with bay leaf, cardamom, mastic, salt and pepper. Let simmer till chicken is well cooked and vegetables are tender. Strain the broth, and when cool refrigerate for a few hours. Remove the layer of fat that will rise to the surface. You now have a de-fatted broth that you will use to cook with and to replace the oil or butter of traditional recipes. You can also use the same technique to prepare a beef broth, remembering to refrigerate the broth and discard the fat.

To cook a vegetable dish Egyptian style:

Prepare the vegetables of your choice (peas and carrots, for example). Brush a tablespoon of corn oil on bottom of non-stick pan. Heat oil then add tomato sauce and stir. Keep cooking till tomato sauce caramelises and turns dark brown (about 5 minutes). Add chopped onions and stir. Start adding the de-fatted broth, a little at a time, till you have a rich sauce. Add the prepared vegetables, bring to boil then simmer (do not overcook vegetables). This technique approximates the look and feel of the *mesabek* vegetable dishes in our Egyptian cuisine but without all the fat.

Safra Dayma

Hommos fatta

Ingredients:
1 cup boiled hommos
1 cup of hommos water
1 cup cooked chicken (coarsely chopped)
2 pita bread loaves (squared and fired in oil)
4 cartons plain yoghurt
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1/4 cup fried pine nuts
1 tsp. butter
Salt+pepper+allspice+cinnamon

Method:
Blend well the yoghurt with the garlic and salt until it becomes creamy and leave aside to warm up in room temperature. Heat the hommos in its water adding in the spices, and while it is hot pour it over the fried pieces of bread and the chicken. Do not add the whole cup of hommos water, leaving some of it aside in case you find the *fatta* consistency needs it. Pour over the seasoned yoghurt, then melt the butter and pour it on top. Sprinkle the fried pine nuts at random and serve immediately with a green salad and an assortment of sautéed vegetables.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Parlour pleasantries

Nigel Ryan on old New Yorkers

I am not a frequenter of ice cream parlours. I do not like ice cream very much, never have, done, probably never will. So, you can legitimately ask, just what was I doing in Rigoletto's? Well, I was out eating ice cream.

The cappuccino at Rigoletto's had been recommended by a friend, one of those coffee-type people who are very choosy about their cappuccino. The cakes, too, had been recommended, by the same person, who as well as being a coffee aficionado is also a cake fetishist. So off I went, friend in tow, to sample the delights on offer.

The place is acid, acid yellow and orange walls, bright red counter, Salvador Dali posters on the wall. The pictures, I am told, change regularly, and sometimes include mini-exhibitions of original works. But the posters set the tone. Dali it is, after all, the darling of teen angst, and the customers at Rigoletto's are, on the whole, very young.

Tables are circular, granite tops set on wrought iron frames. The chairs are upholstered versions of the same. There is a rack for newspapers and magazines, including, surprisingly, back issues of *The New Yorker*. And at 11 am the young crowd is nowhere to be seen. You can have the place to yourself, which is something of a blessing. Not that it will be quiet, since disco music is a 24 hour feature.

But what of the cappuccino? Unfortunately the machine had broken, the first time she had encountered such a thing, said my Rigoletto's regular companion. So we take her word for it, the cappuccino is

excellent. Instead I had an orange juice, which was fresh, followed by a Nescafe, which was Nescafe. What more need be said. My companion did the same.

Next, the cakes. Beneath glass bell jars sat a chocolate cake, banana bread and an apple and walnut cake. I chose the latter, my companion the banana bread. Both were perfect.

These are out your run of the mill pastries. These cakes are baked rather than assembled in a factory, and they contain real ingredients, real flour, real oats, real bananas, real eggs. The apple and walnut cake sported a cream cheese icing, included quantities of coarsely chopped walnuts, and was amazingly moist. The banana bread tasted of bananas. They were, far and away, the most convincing cakes I have yet encountered in Cairo. You would not be embarrassed to have made them yourself.

Orange juice, coffee and cake — which arrives, incidentally, in very generous portions — for two brought a bill of LE19. Given the absence of other customers, and a resistance to discordant colour schemes, this is a far from unpleasant place to while away half an hour or so, flicking through back copies of *The New Yorker* and generally just watching the world go by. The ice cream, I am told, is as excellent as the cappuccino and I have every faith in the reliability of my informant. She knows about these things.

Rigoletto's, Yomama Centre, Ismail Mohamed, Zamalek.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

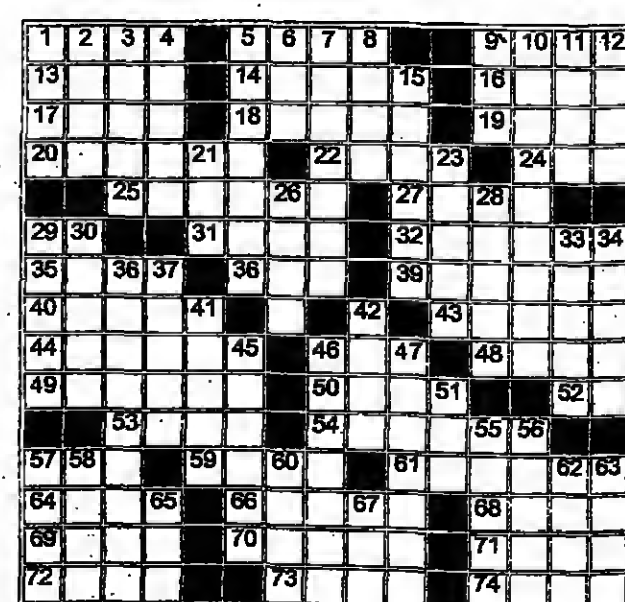
ACROSS

1. Profession of stenosis, pl. (4)
5. Burden (4)
9. Portrays by action (4)
13. Above (4)
14. Internal (5)
16. Split pulse common in India (4)
17. Latin for "year" (4)
18. Tutor (5)
19. US lake (4)
20. Stew (6)
22. Deed of trust (4)
24. Aged (3)
15. Blood vessel (6)
27. To a short time (4)
29. French article (2)
31. Cupid (4)
32. Immature (6)
35. Electrical units, abb. (4)
38. Drunkard (3)
39. Writus, hippopotamus or sirenian (6)
40. Engaged (5)
43. Withered (5)
44. Word-blindness (6)
46. My, Fr. (3)
48. Viscosity (4)
49. Disclosure (6)
50. Muslim caller to prayer (4)
52. Musical note (2)
53. Miss Ferber (4)
54. Great hunter (6)
57. Traveller's resting place (3)
59. Precinct (4)
61. Insulate; thing set distinctly apart from its surroundings (6)
64. Nipples (4)
66. Dams (5)
68. Third and last portions of small intestines (4)
69. Duelling sword (4)
70. Unit of volume (5)
71. South African hollow in which water collects during rainy season (4)
72. Manufactured (4)
73. WWII British gun (4)
74. Dyes, jumbled (4)

DOWN

1. European river (4)
2. Small spirit stove (4)
3. Cuban dance (5)
4. Track or scent of animal (5)
5. Throws into disorder (7)
6. Single (3)
7. Investigator (7)
8. Comb. form for 1/10 (4)
9. Suffix meaning "relating to" (3)
10. Prolonged (9)
11. An extremity (4)
12. Winter vehicle (4)
15. Type of monkey (6)
21. North American Indian tribe (3)
23. 9th day before Ides to Roman calendar (5)
26. Elbow space (4)
28. Proclaim (5)
29. Volcanic mud (5)
30. Mr. Zola (5)
33. Opposite (3)
34. Weather abbreviations (5)
36. Hampered (9)
37. Equipped with male or female characteristics (5)
41. Goddess of the moon (5)
42. Prefix for "half" or "in a less degree" (4)
45. Scams (6)
46. Locale of 30 Across (7)
47. Japanese guitar (7)
51. Abb. of feminine title (3)
55. Emblem of peace (5)
56. Foal round (5)
57. Article (4)
58. Indian palm-tree (4)
60. Nibbles at (4)
62. Necessity (4)
63. Platform (4)
65. Ogle (3)
67. Before, poetic (3)

Last week's solution



Fayza Hassan

'It does not happen here' is a common refrain when questions of gender and sex are raised. But behind a society's "acceptable" vision of itself, a lot does happen

Against mind and body

Well-off women have better access to family planning methods, knowledge, and safe abortion. But Dina Ezzat finds that poorer women are left out of the abortion debate

"I was shattered when my pregnancy test was positive. I was on the pill. I was very careful. We could not possibly afford another child now. We have so many bills to pay. I am extremely depressed and I do not know what to do."

Shahira was in tears as she spoke of her dilemma. The mother of a 9-month-old boy, the 23-year-old is now four months pregnant. She still does not know what to do. Her mother discouraged her from terminating the pregnancy. Meanwhile her friends are trying to find her husband a well-paid job in the Gulf. Shahira does not know what to expect — all she knows is that she "did not want this pregnancy at all."

Unwanted pregnancies are a public health concern. They are common to sexually active couples from different age, social and economic groups. Statistics from the World Health Organisation suggest that every year there are half a million pregnancies all over the world that are unplanned.

In Egypt the problem is common and its consequences are sometimes fatal, said Mawahib El-Mowelhi, gynaecologist at the Cairo Family Planning Association.

The problem knows many names: unexpected, unplanned, and ill-timed. But it has only one face: a woman pregnant against her will with no control over her body.

Unwanted pregnancies were the topic of a two-day conference held earlier this month under the auspices of the Health Development Consultants group. Over 100 participating gynaecologists debated ways of preventing unwanted pregnancies. Also attending were a number of concerned activists from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), sociologists and anthropologists.

Minister of Health Ismail Sallam, in his opening speech, admitted that unwanted pregnancies

are a health concern for many women. Sallam attributed the problem to a general lack of health awareness and education. He promised that his ministry, in accordance with the conference resolutions, will formulate new and amended policies to reduce the occurrence of unexpected pregnancies.

Unmet contraceptive needs, poor family planning counseling, and improper contraceptive use were defined as the main sources of the problem.

Research shows that over 50 per cent of the targeted population for family planning still lacks access to or refuses to seek the service. It also establishes that for the last three decades, family planning programmes have been primarily designed to serve demographic rather than reproductive health interests.

The vast majority of unwanted pregnancies in Egypt happen among married couples who either already have as many children as they want or who want to space their children for economic or social reasons, said Dr Moushira El-Shafie, director of the family planning department at the Ministry of Health. Some of these unwanted pregnancies occur despite contraceptive use.

Family planning was introduced in Egypt in the early 1960s. Today, both governmental and non-governmental studies indicate that the quality of

service in the nation's family planning centres requires significant improvement. Ill-prescribed contraceptives and poor communication between provider and clients increase the rate of contraceptive failure. Consequently, about 17 per cent of women who suffer from unwanted pregnancies get pregnant while they are using the pill.

"At this point women find that nobody wants to take the moral responsibility for the failure of contraceptives," criticised Aziza Hussein, chairperson of the Cairo Family Planning Association.

And most women, especially the poor, are left to their own limited means to cope with a problem which they themselves may not be entirely responsible for.

"Only the well-off have access to the clean well-equipped clinics and benefit from the good care of well-trained gynaecologists," said El-Mowelhi.

The average cost of an induced abortion at a hygienic clinic, under the supervision of a trained gynaecologist, is LE1000 to 2000. If the pregnancy is not detected early enough, this amount could soar to LE10,000.

Obviously, this prohibitive cost leaves many women at the mercy of inexperienced doctors or completely dependent upon themselves. Self-induced abortion — conducted under life-threatening conditions — then becomes the option.

Research conducted by reproductive health workers in preparation for the UN International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, showed that these women often resort to inserting knitting needles into their cervix to terminate their pregnancies instead of enduring a costly operation or the stigma that comes with it.

Consequently, at least 7 per cent of the victims of maternal mortality die because of abortion.

For those who survive, the operation is extremely painful. A study conducted by the Population Council noted that at the post-abortion stage, many women fail to take the required rest and nutrition because of having to resume their household duties. Moreover, more women have more than their physical pains to cope with. If relatives and neighbours know about the abortion, then there is always the psychological price to pay.

As one woman told the Population Council researchers, "People will always harass a woman who has undergone an induced abortion. They will tell her that she has done something that is like killing a soul. They will tell her that it is sinful. I know that what they say is right. But I had to sacrifice myself for the sake of my children and husband. What else could I have done?"

The conference of the Health Development Consultants seemed to show little understanding for the situation of this woman

Azhar, that during the first four months of pregnancy — before the ensoulment of the fetus — abortion is licensed in Islam for a variety of reasons including health, cases of rape and incest and extreme poverty.

The vast majority of the participants refused to recognise that psychiatric syndromes, like serious depression resulting from rape or incest, as "medical" reasons which entitle women to seek an abortion.

Dr Ahmed Rashad, gynaecologist and member of the Health Development Consultants suggested that it does not matter much if the pregnancy was unwanted by the mother or both parents. According to Rashad, abortion is only permissible in a case where "a doctor does not want the pregnancy to continue". Rashad said, "Other than this I do not have a licence to kill".

Like many other participants, the basic concern of Rashad and other anti-abortion doctors was that legalising abortion may encourage "casual sex".

"This is completely beside the point," said El-Mowelhi. "There is a very limited percentage of women with unwanted pregnancies who get pregnant out of wedlock with their full consent. It is unfair that we leave so many more neglected because of this concern," she added.

The recommendations of the conference focused on prevention. The creation of a larger number of well-equipped family planning centres was advised. Proper reproductive health education was also advocated.

But many agreed that the conference failed to address the problem with a holistic approach. The Population Council study quoted one woman who was socially castigated for having had an abortion: "Some people do not give mercy to others, and do not allow God's mercy to fall on us."

Culture of silence

"The most neglected tragedy of our time": over half a million women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth. *Al-Ahram Weekly* looks at maternal morbidity and mortality in the developing world

A culture of silence is perpetuating maternal mortality in the developing world, declares *The Progress of Nations*, UNICEF's most recent report released this month. Mariz Tadros reviews the report "Almost 600,000 women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth," says the report and "For every woman who dies, approximately 30 more incur injuries, infections and disabilities which are usually untreated and unspoken of, and which are humiliating and painful, debilitating and lifelong." The message given by Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF, is definitive and simple: "It is... no exaggeration to say that the issue of maternal mortality and morbidity, fast in its conspiracy of silence, is the most neglected tragedy of our times."

Nearly two-thirds of the estimated fatalities occur when women "die lying on the floor, or being pumped blood onto the floor of bus or bullock cart or blood-soaked stretcher as their families and friends search in vain for help," reads the report.

Women's abortion attempts, often using sharp objects, cause 75,000 deaths a year. "Many do not survive with a punctured uterus, infected wounds and creeping sepsis, they die in pain and alone, bleeding and frightened," indicates the report. Brain and kidney damage, ante-natal gynaecological problems and labour obstructions account for many more deaths.

It is estimated that 300 million women — more than a quarter of the adult women currently alive in the developing world — suffer injuries from pregnancy and childbirth more than once during their child-bearing years.

The report indicates that problems associated with childbirth are not regarded as a general issue of public health: "women are conditioned not to complain but to cope," thus breeding "a conspiracy of silence".

The "conspiracy of silence," coupled with a number of cultural and socio-economic factors, is best preserved in Asia and the Pacific (291,000 maternal deaths per year), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (219,000) and the Middle East and North Africa (35,000). Sierra Leone has the worst figures in the world, with 1,800 maternal deaths every year.

As for Egypt, the maternal mortality rate given in the report is 170. At a press gathering last week on the occasion of the release of the UN report, Amina El-Guindi, head of the National Council of Childhood and Motherhood said "This figure is not really accurate because it was taken a few years ago. The figure has gone down to 149 now according to the latest available statistics". Also participating in the debates that followed the press gathering were Minister of Education Hussein Bahaaeddin and UNICEF regional director, Baqer Nazim.

Traditional practices such as female genital mutilation are closely connected with maternal mortality. "Every year several million women approach childbirth knowing that the risk will be greater because some or all of their genital mutilation," the report says. Despite the well documented and much publicised implications of the practice on women's reproductive health, there are still two million girls being mutilated each year, and the percentage is highest in Africa.

In Nigeria, there are 32.8 million women who have undergone genital mutilation. In Somalia and Djibouti, 98 per cent of girls are "circumcised", in Sudan and Gambia the figure is 89 per cent and in Egypt around 80 per cent of girls are circumcised.

"I personally believe that female genital mutilation is a form of violence against girls. It is internationally recognised as child abuse. There are no medical justifications for its continuation," said Bahaaeddin.

Bahaaeddin affirmed that with education efforts directed towards women, enhancing awareness among women, media campaigns and the support of the grand sheikh of Al-Azhar, the practice will disappear. It is mothers and grandmothers who cling onto the practice and not fathers, husbands or religious leaders, added

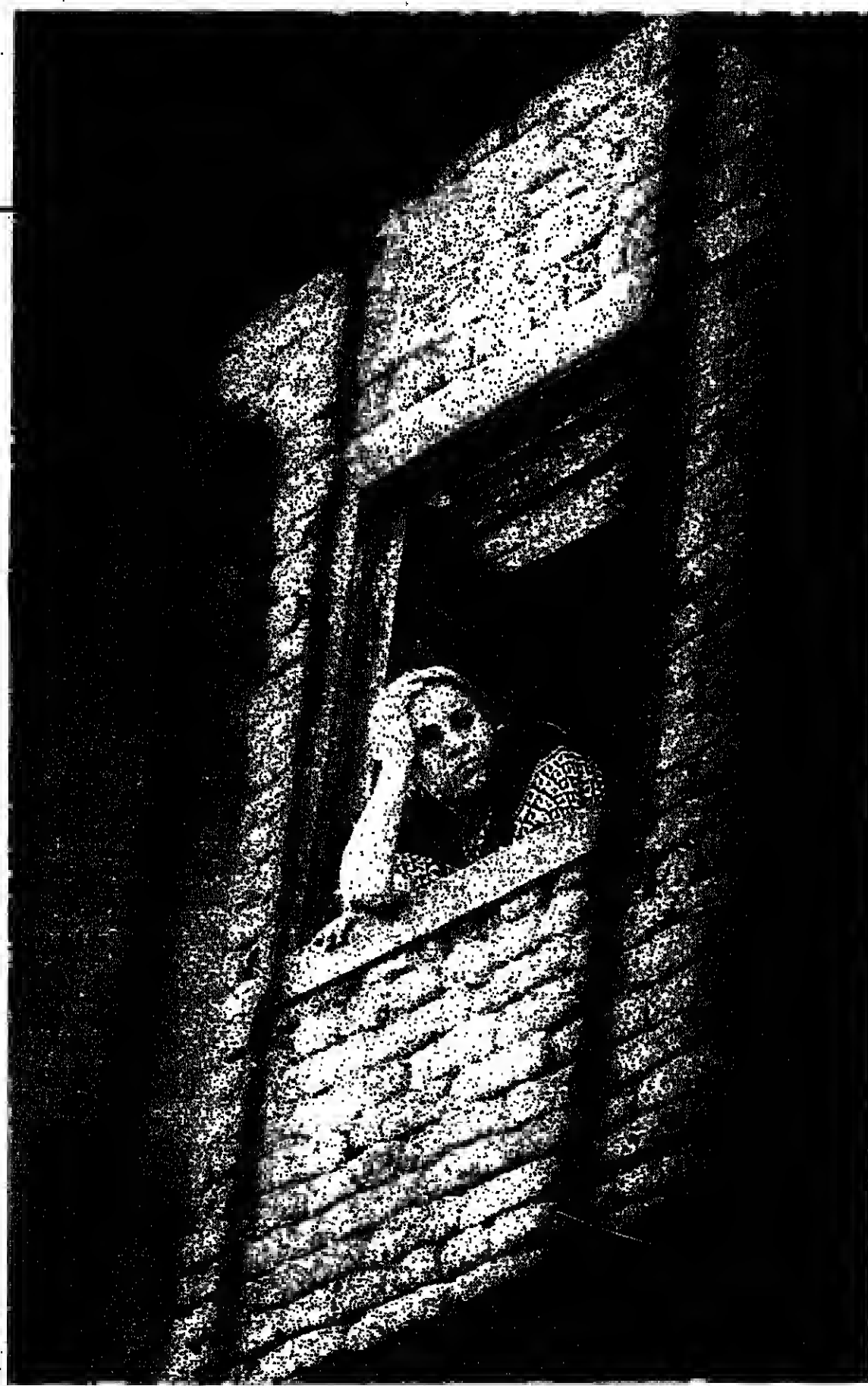


photo: Jihan Ammar

El-Guindi. She asserted that the issue is very much related to the general upgrading of a woman's well-being, her education, the health services available to her and her awareness of her human rights.

Female education is a weapon against such forms of oppression and statistics show that it often leads to later marriages and lower birth rates, confirmed the *Progress of the Nations* report. And yet 94 per cent of girls in Somalia are still not attending primary school, with slightly lower figures for Mali, Niger and Ethiopia. In Afghanistan, Chad and Nepal, there is a 28 per cent difference between boys and girls attending school. In Yemen, the gap is the greatest, with a 37 per cent difference between genders.

It is however, the lack of proper obstetric and gynaecological care available to women in developing countries that is the greatest cause of concern. The *Progress of Nations* report recommends that essential health care for pregnant women in the developed world is made available, as well as obstetric care by professionals in a safe environment.

UNICEF dismisses the idea that such care would be too costly. Deborah Maine, an expert on maternal health, argues, "You don't need five-star hospitals and expensive equipment. There are thousands of hospitals in the developing world that, with minimum upgrading, could provide adequate obstetric care in emergencies... Many are unusable for the lack of \$100 worth of maintenance."

The UNICEF report indicates that the world's richest countries have made further cuts in development assistance, reducing aid to 0.3 per cent of their combined gross national products — its lowest point in 20

years. Of all the industrialised countries, the United States donated the least percentage of its GDP to developing countries (0.15 per cent), according to 1994 statistics released in the report.

Moreover, in most developing countries, military projects are still allocated more funds than basic health needs. On average, health care receives 1.6 per cent of the gross national product, while military ventures are allocated 4.3 per cent. Nazim asserted that an analysis of the composition of international aid given to developing countries would reveal that many are not meeting their 20-20 target (in which both donors and governments allocate 20 per cent of aid and government expenditure respectively to basic social services).

"We are not talking of hospitals, we are talking of basic health, we are not talking of university, we are talking of primary education," said Nazim. He pointed out that whilst Egypt may be allocating the required proportion of its overall budget to social services, international aid donated to Egypt for instance from USAID does not allocate the 20 per cent to basic social services.

"We seem to be moving backwards here," declared Bellamy at a press conference in Paris, commenting on the world's apathetic attitude towards maternal mortality. "No one who has not experienced what is meant by maternal mortality and morbidity can know its depths," charged Peter Adamson, editor of the UNICEF report. "And those who do know are usually silenced — by their early deaths, by their poverty, by their gender, and by the insulting layers of censorship and embarrassment that still surround the issues of sex, blood, and birth in most societies of the world."

At mercy's door

Mariz Tadros visits a home where society's scorned seek refuge

I knocked on the door with the thick iron grille. There was no response. I went to the green gates shut with a chunky lock. After a few minutes, someone looked at me suspiciously, asked for my identity and returned a little later to let me in, quickly shutting the gates as I stepped in.

How did you find out we were here? How did you find out about our organisation? Why are you here? Do you realise that you must never mention anything about this place to anyone? For an organisation set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs, in operation since 1966, administered and fully funded by the ministry, the excessive show of secrecy seemed out of place. Until that is, I was told that this is the only refuge in Egypt that seeks to protect unmarried mothers-to-be. The one-storey house with its nine current residents is one of the ministry's best kept secrets — the cases there may indicate why.

Meet Soraya, an unmarried pregnant adolescent who has no idea who the father of her child may be. Soraya looks more like an inflated child than an expectant mother. Soraya is around 14, but does not know for sure; she is illiterate and has never held an identity card.

Soraya has a faint and distant recollection of her past, especially concerning what happened to her during the years she lived on the streets. She was transferred to her current residence by the juvenile women's prison who suspected she was pregnant.

Shortly after Soraya was born, her mother left her and her siblings with their father. "My father used to beat me and give me rotten food to eat", she said, not wanting to reveal any more on why she used to run away from home.

Her life was a cruel cycle; she hated school and ran away, living on the streets as a beggar. The police would find her and force her back home. Her father would beat her and she would run away once again. The cycle ended when she was charged with slitting a man's face with a razor. Soraya vowed to me she didn't do it, her friend did it to protect them both, she says.

Over the years, she has been assaulted by countless men, she says. The way she tells it, she should be pregnant with the child of any one of a number of men. She reveals no pain, bitterness or grief; her memory is frozen and except when pressured to reply, she remains mute. Soraya is expecting her baby in a few months time.

It is difficult to form stereotypes of the residents at this refuge. Though Soraya came from a poor, broken family, Samira didn't. Samira, like Soraya and all the other girls at the refuge, is pregnant, but unlike Soraya, she is literate and from a middle-class and stable family.

Samira was raped by her cousin one day when she was at home alone. She was brought to the shelter by her parents who wanted to preserve the family honour. Attempts to force her cousin to marry her failed, she is now in bidid until she gives birth and gives her baby up for adoption.

Rape victims, although the majority, are not the only cases at the centre. Nermin, for instance, was married when she got pregnant, but the baby she is about to deliver is considered illegitimate. Nermin married a 60-year-old foreigner by orf (an unofficial but legally recognised marriage). She had hoped that her husband would take her away with him when he returned to his country.

After a month of marriage, she woke up one morning to find her husband

gone — and with him all proof that they were ever married. Nermin says she never imagined this would happen because he treated her so well when they were together. After some desperate attempts to find him abroad, she found their rent contract which had expired on the day he left her and was signed under a pseudonym.

Nermin and the other girls all sleep in a small bedroom containing three bunk beds. The other bedroom is for the live-in social worker who takes care of them 24 hours a day. All food, accommodation, medical help and legal services are paid for by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Despite the shelter's tiny budget it is still clean, bouncy and has some ante-natal and post-natal facilities.

Under no circumstances are any of the girls allowed to leave the home during their stay. For visits to the ocar-hy hospital and to the lawyer, they must be accompanied all times by the social worker. The premises feel somewhat like a prison, except that the intent is not to defend society from the imprisoned but to defend the imprisoned from society.

One government employee with close links to the shelter and its residents said that 90 per cent of the residents were victimised in some way or another — whether through rape or through men who have used, abused, exploited or manipulated them in some way.

The employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "The association does what it can to track down the rapist or the father and force him to marry the woman. I know it sounds monstrous but it would be even worse for her to live in a society where she may risk losing her life. Besides, it is sometimes possible to force the man to sign the marriage and divorce papers simultaneously so that at least she would hear the title of a divorcee instead of a single unmarried mother which is synonymous with being a prostitute."

However, in Soraya's case, it is virtually impossible to track down the aggressor, even if Soraya could identify him. And in Nermin's case, how would she be able to find a man who has left the country, whose real name she does not even know?

For most of the girls who come to the shelter, giving up their baby for adoption is their one and only option — no matter how badly some of them want to keep their baby. "Getting rid of the baby is most of the girls' first priority, no matter how painful it may be for some because if they do keep their babies, society will regard them as worthless immoral outcasts. Nobody believes or would want to believe that the girl was raped or victimised," explained the employee.

Poverty, family breakups and social traditions are all factors which lead to these women's desperate situations. "The neighbours on the floors above speak to the girls with scorn and contempt", says the employee. The social worker who takes care of the girls is looked upon with dismay and often disgust. As a result, surrounding residents are told that the shelter is for orphans.

Despite this guise, the girls live in a constant state of fear that someone might try to break in. They fear the fundamentalists may attack, claiming that this is a house for the protection of immoral women. Most of all, they fear being out again in the community, exposed to the knowing and merciless gaze of society.

All names have been changed to protect the identities of the residents.

Restor-errs

Cairo's restoration schemes often cause more harm than good. Should we favour mud-brick or cement, the use of subtle touches or total revamping? **Omayma Abdel-Latif** scopes out the monuments

Mohamed Hussein was dusting the walls of Amr Ibn Al-As Mosque, when a block of stone fell from the ceiling. Fortunately, the chief restorer suffered only minor injuries. The incident, however, raised quite a few eyebrows as to the safety and efficiency of restoration across the city.

The mosque, like many others, has been subject to several restoration projects over the past decade. Every time it is restored, different materials are used. "The restored parts do not last for more than three years before they crack," said Hussein.

The case of Amr Ibn Al-As Mosque, and before that the Sphinx of Giza where restoration also failed, has sent alarm bells ringing. How many more monuments will come to grief in this restoration boom?

The most common cause of bad restoration, which more often than not ends in failure, is the improper use of modern building materials like cement, plaster, red-brick, concrete tiles and crushed marble. Also, the standard of workmanship in some projects is questionable.

Thick layers of cement spread on the walls of the mosques of Baybars Al-Khayat, Al-Aqmar and Al-Hakim are examples of how restoration should not be carried out.

"In some parts of the mosque, the original painting with fine calligraphy were removed or painted over with modern material. This means only one thing: complete erosion of the past, which is unforgivable," said one restorer of the Baybars Al-Khayat Mosque.

According to Sayed El-Arabi, a mosque restorer in Islamic Cairo, the restoration procedures undertaken at most of the area's sites are designed to maintain the buildings as places of worship.

"Since the old churches and mosques are still in use and are subject to daily wear-and-tear, we curb the decay. We mean to preserve the genuineness of the monument, but also to conserve the original purpose for which it was built," El-Arabi explained.

His opinion is not shared by all. According to one historian, the key to successful restoration of a monument lies in the analysis of the original construction material.

"Restorers have to first understand what is behind a monument, respect the current condition and try to leave things as they were, as much as possible," said American University in Cairo (AUC) history Professor Fayza Helal. But this is ignored by many restorers, especially those who carry out major facelifts.

A Spanish architect working in one of the old *sabils* (water fountain) in Islamic Cairo, to cite one example, was ready to demolish the area most severely hit by the 1992 earthquake and plan a reconstruction scheme. His proposal was turned down by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA).

"The Spanish Archaeological Centre had to work out another solution, because a monument, once demolished, can never be reconstructed to its original state," said an Egyptian restorer working with the Spanish architect. "We take into account the necessity of preserving and maintaining the building as it is, because it is our duty as restorers to redress the damage and, in the meantime, consolidate and preserve the monument," he explained.

Ahmed El-Sawy, head of the Antiquities Department at Sohag University, identified three restoration schools. The traditional Egyptian style of restoration tends towards mortar mixed with sand and limestone to complete missing parts. "The colour of this material is a bit lighter than the rest of the monument so that it can easily be identified as a restored part. This method is used on the West Bank of Luxor, the Beni Hassan tombs in Minya and the tombs of Saqqara," he said.

Another school, dubbed the Italian style, focuses on the replacement of all the monument's missing parts. Modern techniques are used and darker lines are drawn on the restored parts. This method was implemented in a small section of Nefertari's Tomb but proved to be unsuccessful.

The Polish school of restoration utilises yet another approach: restorers replace the missing parts of a monument, but without using any distinguishing features. This method has been carried out for the past three decades in the Temple of Deir El-Bahri.

"The Egyptian traditional style of restoration has proven the most successful in preserving our heritage," said El-Sawy.

Some archaeologists, however, raise the opinion that the process of restoring a monument is merely "an irreversible obscuring of history."

"Only the deteriorated parts of the monuments should be cautiously treated; there is no need to make a re-do of the monuments because you cannot make a re-do of history," said Professor Inceemee of Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Monuments and old buildings, be explained, are living organisms. They are not dead objects because they have a function in this society. They get older, like human beings. Maybe they will die one day, as nothing is eternal, but they should be treated as living objects as long as they stand.

He believes that a building or monument's original construction material best serves the purposes of restoration. "Using the same lime plaster mixed with sand, for instance, to cover the inside of the building, has proved more durable and far less damaging to the monument," said Professor Inceemee. He has carried out research of such restoration techniques in Deir El-Ahmar in Wadi El-Natrun. "If you want to restore a painting and bring it back to its original condition, you should realise that if you use modern paints in combination with ancient fragments, sooner or later there will be problems. It is like a doctor's job. He cannot put the heart of a monkey into a human body; it might work for few hours but then the patient will die."

People tend to forget that Egyptians have been using wood and mud brick for thousands of years to restoration, and it works. But some think it is fashionable to use steel and plastic.

Professor Inceemee also warns against using any chemicals to impregnate the monuments, "because it is difficult to separate them from the painting or the architecture at a later phase. The damage may turn out to be irreversible."

Some archaeologists believe that new methods should always be considered in the painstaking work of restoration. The German mission restoring the Temple of Seti I at Qurna has, according to Peter Stadelmann, director of the German Archaeological Institute of Cairo, used a new kind of injection which has been developed in Germany in limestone buildings. "This technique is new, expensive and difficult, but it is needed for restoration. Before using it, several experiments were carried out to Germany which proved successful," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

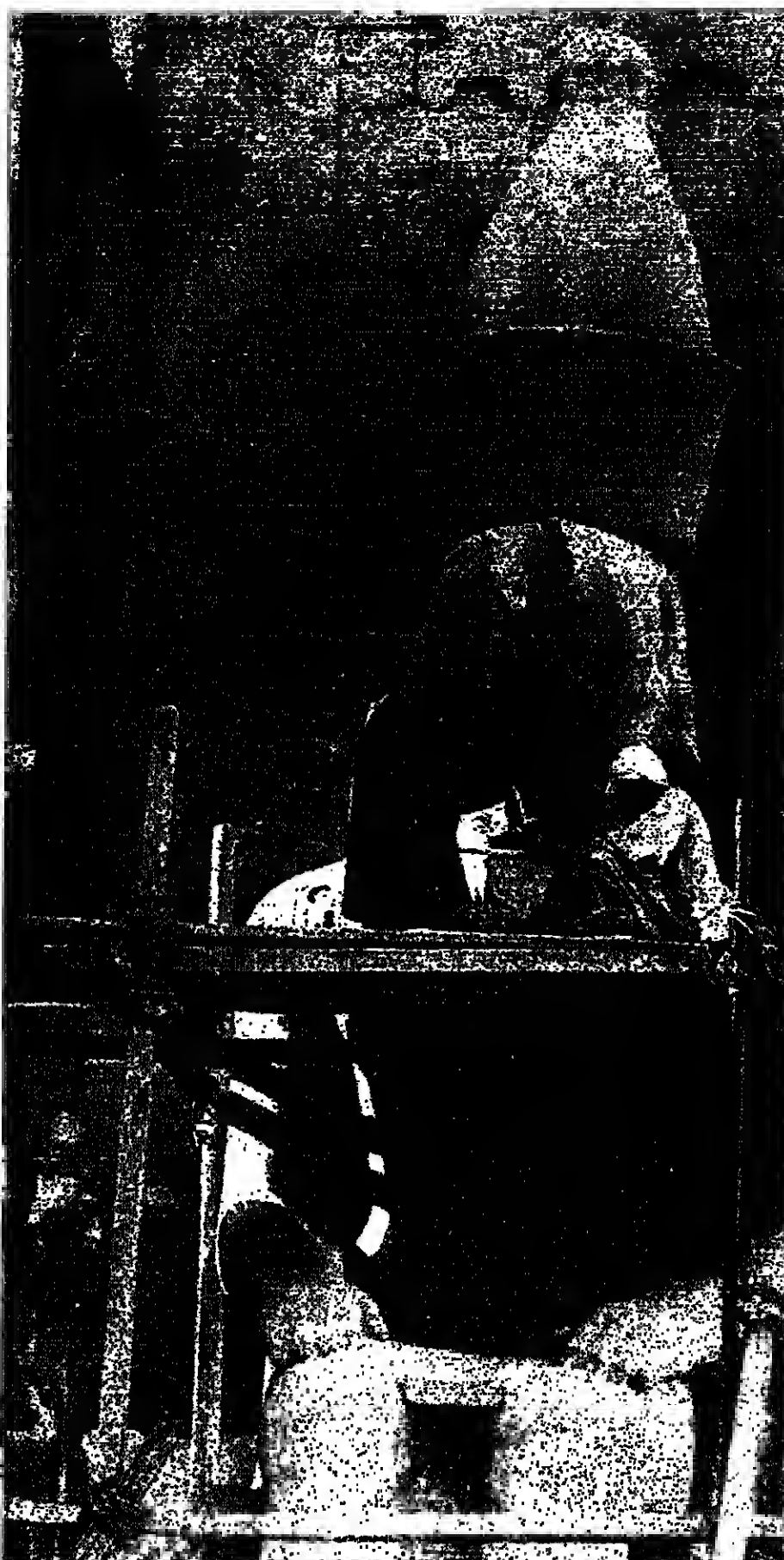
The institute also established a restoration school in Qurna and on Elephantine Island where more than 15 workmen were trained to use the best restoration methods.

"We teach them to go back to the organic material, to use mud-brick to complete walls and foundations, and over to mix cement with other material," Stadelmann said.

Why is it then that some restoration projects are doomed to failure, even when proven methods are properly introduced to restoration techniques? One expert believes that "building contractors, rather than specialised restorers, are entrusted with the task of restoration. They deal with ancient monuments as though they were blocks of apartments and maintain no moral responsibility towards them."

"All they want is to make money," said a member of a foreign mission who asked that her name be withheld, of the contractors.

The poor standard of workmanship is also partly to blame. According to the above-mentioned expert, some SCA officials compromise on quality to complete the buildings quickly and to "save face before a critical local and international audience."



Not a tuck and stitch, but a professional facelift for Raunes II

Michael Mallinson of the Egypt Exploration Society has been working in Tel El-Amarna for over ten years and said that conservation should, in the first place, be designed to suit both the material and the people. "We have to look, on the small scale, at the nature of the material and how it will survive, and on the large scale, how the people living around the monument will be affected by the material," he said.

The problem Mallinson faces in the case of Tel El-Amarna has to do with cultivation. "Sometimes farming in certain areas causes damage to monuments so we try to set priorities," he said, pointing out that the main characteristics of the English school of restoration is that it is very selective in the material employed.

"We try not to use anything modern and make sure that everything very well-researched before making a decision about which way to do the work. We've learned from experience that new material will decay much faster than old material. After three or four years the new restoration will completely blend with the old and you are confronted with the same problem," Mallinson said.

Proper maintenance of buildings is a difficult task since most of the historic areas fall prey to a complexity of destructive factors. Pollution, vibration from traffic, misuse of the monuments and consecutive improper restoration can be seriously damaging.

Monuments are not only brought to ruin due to faulty restoration techniques, said Shawkhi Nakhl, head of the Restoration Department at the SCA. "There are also problems such as the continued urban sprawl of buildings, subterranean water and agricultural encroachments," he said.

A good restoration plan, however, can help keep these monuments in good shape for generations to come. Though some of today's restorers cannot be accused of the same ill-conceived work as their predecessors, the recent unfortunate incidents resulting from restoration errors might prove a lesson well-learned.

photo: Antoine Abbot

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How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Al-Maza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sharm. Tel. 771-661.

Cairo-Alexandria

Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Al-Maza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 5pm; LE21 thereafter, from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Al-Maza at 7.15am. Tickets from Al-Maza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Port Said

Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Al-Maza, then Ramses Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said

Service 6.45am, from Ramses Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Al-Maza. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada

Service 8pm, from Ramses Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Al-Maza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to north Sinai, south Sinai, Sharm and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Sharm depart from Qadli (near Ramses Square), Al-Maza and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to north and south Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassia Square. Tel. 492-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia

Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qadli, then Al-Maza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez

Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qadli, then Al-Maza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish

Services every hour from 7.30am to 8pm, from Qadli, then Al-Maza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbassia, then Al-Maza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuremba

Service 8am, from Abbassia, then Al-Maza. Tickets depart bus LE31.

West Delta Bus

Stations at Tahrir and Al-Maza. Tel. 243-1946.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage

Service 8am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quena

Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor

Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan

Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan from Ramses Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan

"French" deluxe trains with sleeper services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am next day, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners; LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleeper services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria "Tahrir" trains VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.

Standard trains: Services 8am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE30; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE28.

EgyptAir There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: July 590-0999; Opera 590-5644; or Elton 739-8806.

Cairo-Aswan Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor Tickets LE220 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE321 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sunny summer deals Hotels Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.

Hurgada Hurgada Intercontinental. LE200 for a single, LE240 for a double room including breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until 15 July.

Hurgada Marriott. LE200 per person in a double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until 15 July.

Hurghada Regency. LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.

Sharm El-Sheikh Sharm El-Sheikh Marriott. LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until 31 July.

Sharm El-Sheikh Sharm El-Sheikh. LE190 for a double room and LE130 for a single room including breakfast. Valid until the end of June.

Sharm El-Sheikh Movenpick Hotel. LE200 for a single and LE250 for a double room in the front by the swimming pool. The hotel offers LE160 for a single and LE200 for a double room in the back, or sports area. Prices include buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until the end of July.

Travel agencies Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.

Flamingo Tours: A trip to Nile is LE2,850 for 8 days, Nile and Luxor is LE3,490 for 12 days, Nile and Port Said is LE4,250 for 12 days, Aswan and Sharm is LE3,200 for 10 days, Paris and London is LE4,950 for 15 days, Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is LE5,330 for 12 days. Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from LE1,582 for 8 days.

Karnak Tours is organizing trips to Luxor and Aswan for 4 days in three star hotels on a half board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Ismailia for 4 days at prices starting from LE1,450.

Full steam ahead

How can Egypt increase and develop tourism? This was the question under consideration at the recent meeting of the Supreme Council for Tourism (SCT). To answer the question, the council came up with resolutions designed both to facilitate tourism and streamline procedures (see box). Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagi described the resolutions as revolutionary, largely because they include cooperation between the private and the public sectors.

"Big national projects, whether highways or airports, are going to be established by the private sector according to the BOT (build, operate and transfer) scheme," explained El-Beltagi. Under BOT, the private sector will build and operate structures, and they will then be transferred to the government after a certain length of time. "Our infrastructure has witnessed great developments in the last 15 years," he said. "However, government resources for projects like airports and roads are limited because the government has prioritised other areas like health and education. But now, following the new resolutions, government-sponsored building of the infrastructure will be paralleled by private sector investment."

The council also dealt with expenses paid by tourists, and how they could be minimised or streamlined.

"The reducing of visa fees, or the complete abolition of visas, would be an effective promotional policy and one that has already been adopted by many countries," Beltagi said. Citizens of Europe and America, he added, who constitute 70 per cent of the tourist movement to Egypt according to 1995 statistics, can visit Israel, Turkey, Greece, Tunisia, Cyprus, England and Germany without paying visa fees.

"Now the Ministry of Tourism has requested the Supreme Council of Tourism to issue a recommendation to streamline visa procedures for certain groups, and to study the possibility of abolishing visas altogether for others, especially for those countries which send a lot of tourists to Egypt, provided, of course, that security laws are not violated."

Research on visa reform, he added, should be carried out with coordination between the ministries of foreign affairs, tourism, and finance.

"We have suggested that the service fees Egypt collects for private cars should be reduced from LE1,000 to LE100 on each car," Beltagi said. "Also, customs procedures and formalities for passage through ports and other outlets should be sped up," he added. Beltagi suggested a system whereby a driver produces a certificate from a recognised automobile association in his own country stating that he is committed to paying customs in Egypt should he leave the country without his car.

them commercially, should be exempted from fees, because they automatically promote Egypt's tourist product abroad," Beltagi said.

The council also discussed the opening of new offices around the world, an issue tackled in a paper submitted to the council by the Ministry of Tourism. "After studying the distribution of tourist offices worldwide, it was discovered that there were not enough, and that those in existence did not cover the important tourist markets. So we decided we needed more offices in main tourist markets to allow for more comprehensive tourist promotion," Beltagi said.

The paper suggested that this could be achieved in two stages: the first would be to open new offices in Brussels, Seoul and Kiev financed from the surplus of the fiscal year 1995/1996. This would be followed by new offices in Tel Aviv and Warsaw, Rio de Janeiro and Kuala Lumpur, to be financed by surpluses from the forthcoming fiscal year 1996/1997.

"We need to encourage visitors from these new markets to increase tourist inflow and to give us a strategic stock in case our traditional markets, the US and Europe, are shaken," Beltagi stressed.

And in a further effort to promote Egypt abroad, foreign media advertising is to be increased. The previous, highly successful, campaign had concentrated on advertising on national TV, in specialist newspapers and on billboards and posters. Now, satellite TV is to be included. "In the coming period, the ministry is going to advertise on CNN and NBC International," Beltagi announced. "This will help promote Egypt and offset any media exaggeration in the event of any unfortunate incidents."

SCT resolutions

- Funds allocated for the completion of the Koraymat/Zafarana/Hurgada freshwater pipeline before the end of 1996.
- Approval obtained for the private sector to establish an airport at Marsa Alam.
- Decision taken to construct roads leading to the new airport at Marsa Alam.
- Reconsideration of all tourist expenses including visas.
- Exemption of media delegations from entrance and photo fees to tourist sites.
- Facilitation of entrance and exit formalities for private cars.
- Development of all Egyptian sites and improvement of services.
- Abolition of illegal fees imposed by governorates on tourist establishments or services.

There are also plans to speed up procedures and formalities for all tourists. These include having a special authority for road control at borders such as Taba, and for the Gulf of Aqaba area in general. The acceleration of general entrance procedures for tourists, upgrading the standard of services provided at ancient sites, and the provision of foreign currency for tourists when they leave Egypt were also discussed.

To encourage the media to visit Egypt, the council has decided they should be exempt from all fees. "Delegations which visit Egypt on their own initiative, or by invitation, to prepare TV series about Egypt's ancient tourist sites or to make news reports, without intending to use

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Yachts will enjoy fewer formalities

photo: Sherif Sanbol

Facilitating the entry of private cars into the country was another important way to encourage tourists to come to Egypt, particularly from the Arab world, the minister said. Egypt has long had to counter the problem of illegal car sales, and has therefore imposed large fees on cars entering the country.

Meanwhile, neighbouring competitive countries are encouraging motorists. They facilitate entrance procedures by registering car details on the passport, without charging fees, much to the same way cameras and video cameras are registered on the passports of tourists entering Egypt. Greece, Israel and Tunisia already operate this system.



Ahli footballers celebrating their 2-0 victory over Zamalek, by touring the Cairo Stadium track, and greeting their fans (top); while a shot from the match shows Ahli's Ahmed Felix (right) struggling for the ball with Zamalek's Hussein Abdel-Latif on his way towards scoring his team's first goal

In a tense, sometimes violent, match, Ahli may have clinched their 25th Egyptian Football League trophy, amidst continuing cries of 'foul' from the Zamalek side. Eman Abel-Moeti reports on Tuesday's match



Photos: Mohamed Wassim

Ahli 2, Zamalek 0

It was a tense match, the play was rough, and nothing was certain until the last 15 minutes of the crucial Ahli and Zamalek match at Cairo Stadium last Tuesday. But by the time the final whistle blew, Ahli had scored a resounding 2-0 victory, and it goes without saying, there had been the usual scraps between players and referee. If Ahli draw their next fixture (against Ismaili) they will have achieved their 25th win in the 38 years of the championship's history.

The match started with Zamalek in tight control in midfield, playing with positive but rough defence. This was partly a result of Egypt's international referee Kady Abdel-Azim's failure to call three or four fouls, which encouraged other players to play rough. But before things got out of control Abdel-Azim became meticulous, and before half time, three yellow cards had been given for arguing with the referee. Ahli got two, and Zamalek's Ezzat Nassar was shown the third.

Zamalek's spearhead Hazem Innan made a failed attempt to score in the first five minutes. Ahli also made some rather weak attempts, coming from the left and right while Zamalek retained a strong grip in midfield.

Nevertheless it was clear that Ahli's level of fitness was higher than their rivals', and towards the end of the

first half, Ahli intensified their attacks and had two shots at goal, but Zamalek's goalie Nader El-Sayed was on guard.

Things got rough again in the second half, with Ahli's Hisham Hanafi having to come on in place of an injured Megdi Tolba. Referee Abdel-Azim let more fouls pass unheeded, and the 80,000 spectators became increasingly agitated, loudly demanding a real game of football. Zamalek fans were particularly dismayed, because it appeared that Zamalek was following a policy of defence rather than attack. Towards the end of the match, Ahli changed their plan of attack from the wings and started to invade Zamalek's centre. They managed to find its weak points, and that was the end of Zamalek.

The first goal came after 60 minutes. Ahli's Ahmed Felix got away from his marker Hussein Abdel-Latif to plant the ball in Zamalek's net and score Ahli's 87th goal of the season. Ahli's second goal came when Hisham Hanafi broke through Zamalek's defence, and passed a ball to Hossam Hassan, who charged towards Zamalek's goalkeeper El-Sayed. Without a single defender in the area, El-Sayed was confused. But Zamalek's Nabil Mahmoud ran towards the net past Hassan to help El-Sayed, but was unable to stop Hassan shooting the ball into the goal. Referee Mohamed Tawfiq, standing in the corner,

decided it was a goal, amidst Zamalek claims that it should have been declared offside.

To a background of the roars of furious Zamalek fans, Zamalek board members and players appealed for the goal to be disallowed, but referee Kady Abdel-Azim turned them down. The whole team then withdrew from the pitch with eight minutes to go before the end of the match. After ten minutes, referee Abdel-Azim announced Ahli's victory.

The trouble at Tuesday's game highlighted the ongoing controversy over whether foreign referees should be used in Ahli and Zamalek matches. Accusations of bias, stoppages of play while players contest decisions, and even crowd violence towards the referee, have become par for the course. It was fear of such a scenario which caused Zamalek to request a European referee. Ahli made no objection to the request.

Zamalek's board and players are maintaining their protest at Abdel-Azim's decision, claiming that had the referees been Europeans, no one would have questioned their decisions.

However, Zamalek's request brought criticism from the Confederation of African Football (CAF). Farah Eido, the Somali president of CAF's Referees Committee, objected on the grounds that it violated an agree-

ment between CAF and the Egyptian Football Federation which states that both parties would use African and Asian referees only. Eido threatened the exclusion of Egyptian referees from CAF matches if they used European referees in domestic matches.

The situation became so complicated that Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport, had to intervene and convince them to use an Egyptian referee.

"Even among African referees, there are Ahli and Zamalek fans," argued Nabil Nosseir, Zamalek's manager before the match. "Their decisions would still be questioned by the 100,000 spectators in Cairo Stadium and the millions watching the match on television."

CAF officials respond that if the federation showed some respect for and confidence in their own referees, perhaps the players and the fans would do likewise.

A look at recent history shows that every Ahli and Zamalek match has been sensitive enough for the players to be dissatisfied with the referee, no matter what his nationality was. According to football critic Hassan El-Mistikawe, Ahli and Zamalek matches as long ago as 1962 and 1971 had to be abandoned because of refereeing problems.

Olympic countdown

Games' volunteer workforce

THE LARGEST volunteer workforce in Olympic history will be deployed for the centennial Olympic Games. More than 45,000 volunteers are being recruited and trained to handle jobs ranging from providing first aid, translating, delivering film to the press centre, staffing public information booths to rewriting stories for the daily Olympic Village newspaper, hosting dignitaries, and participating in victory ceremonies during which medals are presented.

Training varies by post. Eovoys — managerial level volunteers who work in the Olympic Village supporting their assigned delegation's *chef de mission* — have undergone a two-year training programme. Other volunteers receive on-site training prior to the Games.

Recruitment has been widespread. Sixteen of Georgia's largest employers comprise the Atlanta Olympic Committee's Corporate Council; each employer has pledged employees — a combined total of roughly 20,000 — to help at the Games. The Peace Corps is helping to recruit interpreters from the ranks of their alumni. Americorps, established by US President Clinton to engage young people in national service, is committing nearly 1,000 volunteers to work in public safety and transport. Volunteers from the United Way are supporting the Olympic torch relay as it travels across the country, and the American Red Cross is recruiting and training 500 medical volunteers.

In the four-year period leading up to the Games, more than 1,600 groups, ranging from hiking clubs and professional societies to cultural organisations and garden clubs, joined the Atlanta Olympic Committee-led Olympic Force, which undertook annual service projects.

This is the first time the Olympic Games have encouraged such an outpouring of volunteers, which represents an unprecedented level of collaboration among the people of a host country to ensure the Games' success.

Swimming ahead

EGYPT'S Mustafa Khalil became the first disabled swimmer to complete the French International Race last week. Thirty-seven able-bodied swimmers also joined the 25km race.

In spite of the obstacles of bad weather and strong winds, Khalil was able to finish ahead of many other swimmers and was carried on the shoulders of French competitors to collect a cup from the French Swimming Federation for being the first disabled swimmer ever to finish the race.

Al-Ahram Handball

AFTER the success of its recent squash tournament, Al-Ahram Organisation, under the chairmanship of Ibrahim Nafie, has decided to organise an International Handball Championship to be held from 2-8 July.

The championship will be the Egyptian handball team's last competition before the Atlanta Olympics. The idea for the competition emerged after the Egyptian team won sixth place in the last World Cup. The team is also predicted to win a medal at Atlanta.

Quarterfinal Euro-fever

Euro 96 has provided all the thrills and spills a dedicated follower of football could wish for. As the final approaches, Eric Asmouggha reports on the championship's latest stages

It's been three weeks of glorious football, but all good things come to an end and the Euro 96 final will be decided at Wembley on Sunday. At the time of writing, we're down to the last four. By publication, the two finalists will have been decided.

The turn of events has left the pundits confused. Italy crashed out in the first round. Holland suffered a massive 1-4 defeat by England, in a classic game that will be remembered for years to come, before being knocked out by France in the quarterfinals in the most agonising way possible — a penalty shootout. Spain suffered the same fate after 120 goalless minutes against England.

The use of penalty shootouts to decide drawn matches remains controversial. What is clear is that it puts immense pressure on the players and especially the goalkeeper. Great teams can fall and great players can fumble, which has been apparent at Euro 96, and penalties can seem a brutally swift solution.

In Spain's match against England, for example, two of Spain's big names failed to get the ball into the net. Fernando Hierro hit the crossbar and Miguel Nadal's kick was saved by England's goalkeeper David Seaman. Meanwhile Alan Shearer, David Platt, Stuart Pearce and Paul Gascoigne all managed to convert their kicks to give England the victory.

The host nation, England, have surprised themselves and others by the quality of their play. Echoes of the still talked-about World Cup win in 1966 are being heard a little more clearly as the team cruised through to the semi-finals with a series of victories (of which the Holland game was by far the most stunning), to end at the top of Group A after an initial disappointing 1-1 draw with Switzerland.

The Netherlands survived Group A — just — but went out in the quarterfinals in their penalty shootout against France. Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf, who admitted that



Portugal's Paulo Sousa (R) and Czech's Radak Latak in action during their quarterfinal European Soccer Championship (photo: AFP)

Holland had made mistakes in their match against England, finally made the worst. His penalty kick was saved by French goalkeeper Bernard Lama, giving the match to France. France, the 1984 champions, went onto the pitch with a 26-game unbeaten streak. They had ended the first round at the top of Group B, after beating Romania 1-0, Bulgaria 3-1 and drawing 1-1 with Spain.

Meanwhile, Germany survived an ill-tempered but exciting quarterfinal match to beat Croatia 2-1. Jurgen Klinsmann, who made a brief but incident-packed performance, scored Germany's first goal with a penalty in the 20th minute. He received a yellow card, escaped a red after a bad kick on Davor Suker, and limped out of the game with a

calf muscle injury before the break. Suker equalised for Croatia in the 51st minute, but "striking defender" Matthias Sammer scored the winning goal for Germany seven minutes later. The Czech Republic, the outsiders among the eight quarterfinalists, continued their magic at Villa Park by beating Portugal 1-0. They had upset Italy 2-1 in Group C and managed a late equaliser against Russia to join the last eight. Karel Poborsky was the Czech hero. In the 52nd minute, he made his way through four Portuguese defenders and chipped the ball into the net as goalkeeper Victor Bata rushed out for a save.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

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Mubarak invites IAA members to attend the 36th Congress in Egypt

MEMBERS of the International Advertising Association (IAA) received President Hosni Mubarak's address in the 35th congress held in Seoul, Korea, with great interest. At the end of his address, which was displayed on big-screen televisions, President Mubarak extended an invitation to the IAA members to attend the 36th Congress which Egypt will host in 1998.

2500 attendees plus 500 students in Korean and American universities listened to Mubarak's address that was translated in both Korean and Arabic. It was also distributed in pictorial brochures on Egypt to those attending the event.

Some IAA members commented that Mubarak's address was objective and reflected Egypt's interest in keeping up with modern technology. The address also shed light on the topic of the 36th Congress in Cairo, "Interaction", in relation to the potential of the host country, Egypt.

Reception of the guests

The guests included the members of the IAA and high-ranking Korean officials who were received by HE Mohamed Amin Shaleqami, Egypt's ambassador to Korea and his wife; Mr Adel Mohamed Afifi, president of the IAA Egypt Chapter, general manager of the advertising department and member of the board of Al-Ahram Establishment and Lula Zaklana, vice-president of IAA conference affairs and vice-president of IAA Egypt Chapter also received the IAA guests.

The event started off with the Korean national anthem, followed by the Egyptian one. Lula Zaklana delivered the opening speech in which she said:

"7000 years ago, the pharaohs devised

methods for communication and advertising. The Pyramids, which were the first means of advertising, bear witness to this fact. Papyrus was the first civilized means for communication on which messages were sent.

"Interaction in the 21st Century" is the title of the forthcoming congress which Egypt will host in 1998.

Let us contemplate in the next few months those changes and challenges which will face the telecommunications industry in this fast-paced, ever-changing field.

In the past, access to information was never an easy task. Therefore, each country remained isolated from its neighbours. This barred the flow of information on the lifestyles of neighbouring peoples and their civilizations.

Today, we are very lucky because we live in the age of highly-advanced telecommunications. There is no end to this ongoing progress.

With the substitution of military wars for economic ones, the role of telecommunications and advertising has become more and more

effective as countries of the world endeavour to solve their border disputes and achieve their different inter-related interests through means other than military clashes. Thus, the language of bullets has changed because telecommunications offers the most constructive means by which objective dialogue and problem-solving can take place. In the end, telecommunications will prove to be the best tool to achieve peace and prosperity.

On the threshold of a new age, it is the duty and responsibility of those who work in the mass media to work together to establish an information base through advertising which will lead us to a prosperous world we need to live in, a world that we deserve."

Speech of the Egyptian ambassador to Korea

Amin Shaleqami, Egyptian ambassador to Korea, was next to address the attendees. He said: "For myself and on behalf of the members of the IAA Egypt Chapter, I thank all of you for giving us the honour of receiving you, our dear guests. It is my utmost pleasure to

welcome you to take part in the Egyptian Night that will acquaint you with a part of our culture and cuisine.

On this occasion, I take the opportunity to thank the Korean government for its generosity and hospitality which we all felt. I would also like to thank them for the good atmosphere they provided and for the lovely life I spent here during my 5-year term. My colleague, the Korean ambassador to Egypt, and I are working hard and doing our best to enhance Egyptian-Korean relations.

Finally, I welcome you again and thank you for your participation. And now, let me present the address of Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt."

President Hosni Mubarak's address to the 35th IAA World Congress

Ladies and gentlemen, Members of the 35th IAA World Congress, It gives me pleasure to take this opportunity to welcome you to this evening's festivities and to invite you to become acquainted with the 36th IAA World Congress, which will be

held in Cairo in May 1998.

I am certain that when you come to Cairo to share in the work of your next congress, you will be given the opportunity to become closely acquainted with Egypt, the people and the country.

You are sure to enjoy visiting its unique antiquities, which are a witness to 7000 years of ancient civilization, and learning of its modern renaissance, making your last congress of the century a fruitful experience.

"Interaction" is the theme of the Cairo congress and the choice of the theme and venue cannot be more fitting. The Egyptian civilisation is synonymous with communication and

interaction between people, cultures and religions. Egypt's history, which is unique, is evidence enough that this interaction is not only possible but is also desirable and full of riches.

The revolution in communications has made our world a small global village, just as the media in Egypt in all their forms, have been able to cover a great deal of ground in keeping pace with this revolution to find for themselves a fitting place on the international map of information.

Information's creative scope can greatly contribute towards building bridges and consolidating understanding between cultures and civilizations, contributing towards peace, security and economic welfare in every part of the world.

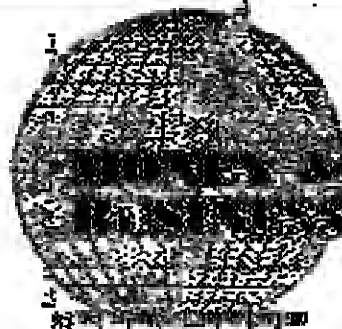
I therefore invite you to contribute your constructive efforts, in order to continue your noble goals. In bidding you farewell, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on the success of your 35th IAA World Congress and look forward to welcoming you to Cairo in May 1998.

Have a good evening.

Vacation '96 Expo

HERALDING the start of summer vacation, Graphic Station Advertising has organised Vacation '96 Expo. Tarek Salih, general manager of the agency, explained that the fair will be held at El-Shams Club, one of the largest clubs with a capacity of 300,000 people. The fair will feature major companies selling and showcasing a variety of products and goods, including ready-made clothing, leatherware, cosmetics, sportswear, even automobiles and motorcycles. The expo will be held from 27 June to 1 July 1996.

MONEY & BUSINESS



El-Chark insures Barada for LE1mn

WITHIN the framework of the social role taken by financial organisations, El-Chark Insurance Co. held a reception in honour of International Egyptian Squash champion Ahmed Barada and other players in the sport. Borham Attia, head of the company, presented Barada with a LE1mn accident policy. The company hopes that this will be an incentive for other athletes to insure themselves against event of suffering any injuries.

NBE: Egypt's premier financial institution for 98 years

LAST TUESDAY, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) completed its 98th year of operation. On 25 June 1898, NBE was established as an Egyptian joint stock company with a capital of one million pounds sterling.

Since its foundation, NBE was entitled with issuing bank

notes and keeping the government accounts, besides its activities as a commercial bank.

All along its long history, NBE has embarked upon mobilising and employing savings in different fields of development in the context of the various economic policies and stages of the Egyptian economy; starting from Egyptianisation and nationalisation, followed later by the economic open door policy and ending with the current economic reform.

Throughout these phases, the bank has been distinguished with its pioneering policies and activities, mainly:

— Maintaining its position on top of the Egyptian banking system, NBE's balance sheets, as of December 1995, recorded LE51bn with an increase of 12.6 per cent over the previous year. Deposits amounted to LE37bn whereas loans and investments reached LE31.5bn, with an increase of 8.8 per cent and 9.9 per cent respectively.

— Geographical coverage with special emphasis on new industrial and tourist communities, through 315 domestic banking units.

— Sound presence worldwide via its wholly-owned National Bank of Egypt International Limited, London, and its representative office in Johannesburg. This is in addition to co-establishing the African Export and Import Bank. The bank is also equipped with a network of 1,300 correspondents all over the world.

— Extensive direct participation in different ventures covering various economic activities. NBE's equity participations total some LE 1.3bn distributed on 105 companies with a total capital of some LE11.2bn.

— In 1965, the bank innovated investment trustee services, which were further developed to encompass selling and buying securities and collecting coupons on behalf of its customers, in addition to handling the procedures conducive to evaluating, restructuring and privatising state owned companies. This is besides the bank's traditional services embracing the foundation of companies on behalf of investors, preparing feasibility studies, technical and financial management and promotion of new investment, and underwriting.

— NBE has introduced, for the first time in Egypt, a separate unit for real estate services; namely the Real Estate Market, where real estates are traded in auctions.

— NBE adopted a new concept in financing capital intensive infrastructure projects domestically and abroad. These embrace mainly power stations, toll highways, telephone cables and water purification stations. Moreover, the bank financed the construction of Gaza Airport to enhance

development efforts in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

— Managing syndicated loans as a hedge against credit risks.

— Extending soft loans for pro export projects in addition to buyers' credit.

— Expanding the scope of consumer credit (purchasing cars, housing units and commodities). Total consumer credit amounted to LE 860mn as of 30 June 1995.

— Wider introduction of private banking services, mainly plastic cards in local and foreign currencies, office banking, El-Ahly telebank, cross border system and electronic transfer of funds from abroad.

— The bank supported non-traditional activities by co-establishing the National Telecommunications Company. Besides, it promoted and incorporated the Egyptian Satellite Company (NileSat) which will launch the first Egyptian satellite.

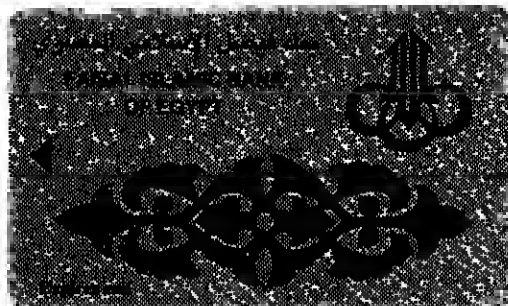
— NBE played a significant role in enhancing the capital market via evaluating enterprises scheduled for privatisation, actively managing its own portfolio, providing margin finance, playing the role of market maker and establishing companies supporting the capital market, namely: El-Ahly Co for Brokerage, El-Ahly Co for Development and Investment and El-Ahly Co for Investments. The bank has also introduced the first mutual fund in Egypt, i.e. NBE Mutual Fund yielding accumulated return, followed by the second fund yielding periodical return.

— The bank has also broken through the field of financial leasing by establishing joint leasing companies with specialised foreign expertise.

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A card holder can also issue cards to his wife, sons or other relatives who will be entitled to receive specified amounts of money.

A card holder is also entitled to receive a deposit card as well as balance inquiries and statements

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Egyptian-Canadian project to be established

BAHAEDDIN Helmi, vice-chairman of Banque Misr, said that in light of the bank's policy towards supporting environmental conservation and public health, in addition to fostering investment cooperation between the Republic of Egypt and the government of Canada, an agreement to establish the Egypt-Canada Mineral Oil Production and Blending Company S.A.E. has been signed and is currently under construction.

Seventy per cent of the company's capital is derived from the following: Banque Misr (which has a 10 per cent share), the Canadian company Titan Projects Ltd and an association of Egyptian businessmen at the forefront of which is Yehia El-Kouri and Ambassador Amin Nimir.



Bahaeddin Helmi

The remaining 30 per cent of the company's capital will be made available for public subscription as of 1 July 1996, in the form of 45,000 shares, valued at \$50 each, \$12.50 of which is paid at the beginning of the subscription.

The company aims to collect and refine mineral oils to produce base oils using modern American techniques. It is expected that international assistance and support from the Canadian government will be granted to the company, for this activity can greatly aid in cleaning the environment which benefits public health.

It is hoped that this will be the first step along the path of private sector investments in the field of refining petroleum-based oils to conserve the environment.



Press delegation from South Africa

IN LIGHT of the efforts undertaken by EgyptAir to promote tourism from distant areas of the world to Egypt, a press delegation representing major South African newspapers and magazines will visit Egypt at the invitation of EgyptAir. In cooperation with the Egyptian Travel Authority and OK Travel, explained Mahmoud Othman, regional manager for Africa. He added that the Civil Aviation Authority of South Africa has approved EgyptAir's new route to Durban, in addition to its current service to Johannesburg and Cape Town. This falls within the framework of the strong ties that join Egypt and South Africa.

حسن حلمي وشركاه

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In July 1948, the first venetian blind was manufactured in Egypt.

The licence given to Hassan Helmy & Co is the oldest licence world-wide given by Hunter Douglas.

Since that time, the company has developed and diversified its product range to include suspended ceilings in 1960, awnings in 1962, roller shutters in 1965, fibreglass insect screens in 1996, vertical blinds in 1968, aluminium windows and doors in 1980 and lately Strato windows (aluminium + resin + wood) in 1996.

In addition to the development of their products, Hassan Helmy & Co has, from the beginning concentrated on quality and the highest level of manufacturing. They dealt with leading companies in all their products, such as Hunter Douglas from Holland; Sodal, Somfy and ZF from France; 3M from the USA and Straco from Italy.



Hassan Amr Helmy
Quality Manager



Amr Hassan Helmy
Managing Director



Hassan Bey Helmy
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Aluminium Windows
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Tubular Motors and
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Roller Shutter
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Decorative Window
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...through to 1996

International companies represented by Hassan Helmy & Co:

- Hunter Douglas (Holland)
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- 3M (USA)
One of the most reputable US corporations producing polyester film for solar protection and shatter-resistance.

- Sodal (France)
Aluminium windows and doors giving air, noise and dust protection unparalleled in Egypt.

- Somfy (France)
Electric motors and automatic control systems.

- ZF (France)
Roller shutter accessories for tape and gear operation.

- Strato (Italy)
First time in Egypt, decorative window frame made of an outside aluminium frame to protect the elements; an inside frame of natural wood to blend warmly with your furnishings and a resin joining the two frames to give the highest technical satisfaction possible.

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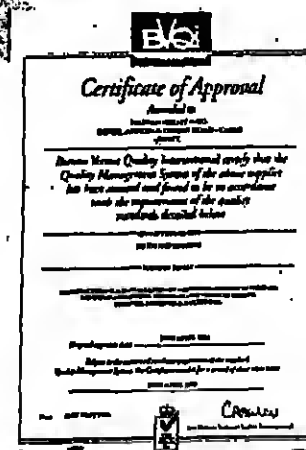
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Mr. Amr Helmy, Managing Director, receiving the ISO 9002 Certificate from Mr. Amr El Sayed, representing BVQI. Between them is Mr. Hassan Amr Helmy.

The British company BVQI, the most reputable world-wide in the field of quality assurance, has awarded Hassan Helmy & Co. the ISO 9002 Certificate. The certificate covers both the manufacturing and installation of aluminium products such as: Windows and doors, venetian and vertical blinds, ceilings, shutters and partitions.



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- Suspended ceilings
- Roller shutters
- Strato windows

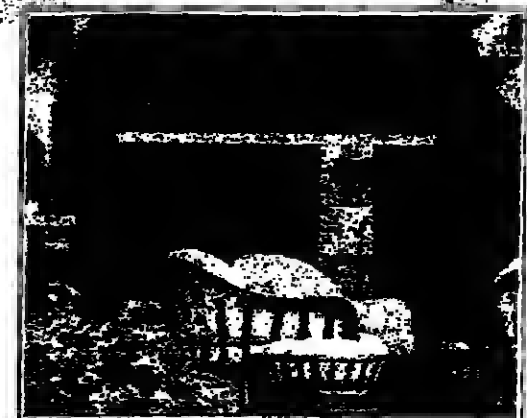


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Edwar El-Kharrat: Mikhail and the dragon

Novelist, poet, critic, one-time political activist, now the laurels are falling on his head. But who is Mikhail, and what the dragon?



Photo: Ramda Shaeih

It has been a season of laurels for Edwar El-Kharrat. Last March, the month in which he turned 70, he travelled to the Emirates to receive the valuable Uwaiss award for fiction. To mark his birthday, the Supreme Council of Culture held a four-day seminar. The medals, tokens and gifts he has received are all arranged on a side-table in the dining room of his Zamalek flat — his wife's gesture, and one in which he takes a quiet pride.

The recent proliferation of laurels meets with a typically dejected response: "I am not displeased, to say the least. The moody (from the award) is good, of course. But it's really that all this brings more readers to my work. Then there are the papers that were written: some very good studies, and some intimate testimonies." Poise and a semblance of equanimity have always stood El-Kharrat in good stead. He has come a long way, from early disregard of his work to an assured place in the canon.

Edwar El-Kharrat was born in Alexandria to an Upper Egyptian father and a mother whose family came from the Delta. He grew up in the Gheir El-Enab area, at the time a predominantly Coptic, somewhat rural neighbourhood. Time and again El-Kharrat, through the eyes of his protagonist/narrator Mikhail, has revisited, in what some describe as a Proustian vein, Gheir El-Enab, Muharram Bey and other quarters where he once lived. Yet "these writings are not an autobiography, nor anything like; the flights of fancy, the artifice herein, bear them far beyond such bounds" he warns in the epigraph of *Turabha Zafaraan*, 1986 (English translation, *City of Saffron*, 1989). His oft-reiterated designation of *City of Saffron* and its sequel *Ya Banat Iskandariya* (English translation, *Girls of Alexandria*, 1993) as semi-autobiographical novels is a necessary warning since his fiction has often been read with the inquisitive scrutiny accorded the roman à clef, to the detriment of other dimensions. But in charting El-Kharrat's biography it is the reworking and transpositions of his experiences that come to light.

Take the choice of the name Mikhail for the protagonist in almost all of his works. It has deep resonances for El-Kharrat. When his older brother died a few days after his birth El-Kharrat's parents vowed that he was to be baptised at the Monastery of Archangel Mikhail in Akhmim, his father's native city in Upper Egypt. "It was such a difficult and costly journey at the time for the whole family to undertake, so circumstances did not permit us until I was six. Thus I was fully conscious, and very religious. I felt I was in danger of dying without being baptised and that that would mean I would never go to heaven and that there would be no salvation. And I remember vividly the event of baptism, from beginning to end... at the monastery on the mountain".

Archangel Mikhail and the unusual circumstances of El-Kharrat's baptism are evoked in many guises throughout the novels. Mikhail too undergoes a seven-year wait for baptism; his mother makes "Angel recitaries" decorated with Coptic words on his name-day; he speaks of the archangel as his patron saint and intercessor; a chance acquaintance, Nagia, tells him of her train journey when her unbaptised son Mikhail fell so ill that she resorted to borrowing a razor from a fellow passenger, a sheikh, to cut her breast and sprinkle him with blood in a sacrament that is miraculously accepted.

From the leitmotif of Archangel Mikhail to the Ethiopian icons that adorn his coffee mug, there is no doubt El-Kharrat is enamoured with Coptic symbolism (in a manner travestied by his imitators). He has on more than one occasion categorically rejected the exoticising label of "Coptic writer", demanding instead to be called an Egyptian writer. And as to faith? He says that now "I can neither say I am an atheist nor a believer. At the same time, I have deep reverence for the Coptic Church, for all its rituals and symbols — but faith is another matter."

El-Kharrat was 16 when the family plunged into financial dire straits. His father's business had failed. His sister Aida and brother Emile were killed in the typhoid epidemic of the early '40s. A year later El-Kharrat's father died. "He did not leave a piastre in the house. I was responsible for my mother and sisters. For a year I struggled to make both ends meet before taking a job at the British Navy depot in Kafr Ashri."

Both Edwar and Mikhail appeared at the Kafr Ashri depot in a second-hand navy blue jacket to which was attached a label reading "Evacuation" — an incident which elicits paternal concern from "Mister Lee", the storehouse manager. Where Mikhail and El-Kharrat part company is in their field of study. While the former studies engineering, El-Kharrat studied law, at Farouk I (now Alexandria) University. But why law? "This was in accordance with my father's wish." His legal studies in law, he muses, "helped develop a sense of concision and precision: in law, a word can make all the difference."

While studying law and working at the depot, El-Kharrat nevertheless managed to attend classes with his friends in the Faculty of Arts. He speaks of his group of university friends, many of them later to distinguish themselves in various fields, most now dispersed in the four corners of the globe, as "the Alexandrian school", though it appears to have been an eclectic crowd. A few years later El-Kharrat would be joining a more homogeneous group — the underground Trotskyite movement in Alexandria. In recounting his years of political activism and subsequent imprisonment, El-Kharrat's habitual circumspection is replaced with something of the fervour of those times.

As secretary-general of the group, El-Kharrat moderated discussions, supervised translations from Marx and the printing of leaflets. "The secretary-general," he says of himself, "would paste leaflets on the lampposts and walls of Muharram Bey, meet factory workers, lecture..."

It was also the secretary-general's task to rein in the excessive zeal of certain anarchist elements in the group. It befell him, for example, to confiscate the hand grenades procured by a comrade from the Bedouins who had in turn procured them from the British forces — an incident referred to in *Girls of Alexandria*. El-Kharrat put the confiscated hand grenades in the pockets of his navy blue jacket one winter night and boarded the train, heading for the room where the group's files were kept, panicking when a policeman stood beside him by chance.

As with many Egyptian intellectuals and artists who have undergone political detention, El-Kharrat's account of his two-year prison experience is rendered less as a tale of oppression than as a story of survival, a badge of honour.

True, political detour was much milder than that experienced by intellectuals detained in the notorious Oasis Prison in the late '50s. Yet El-Kharrat's account of the Abu Qir Prison makes it almost sound like a summer camp. Originally British barracks, the Abu Qir Prison brought together a motley crowd: communists of all hues, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Zionists of different nationalities. "I was the librarian, worked on my French by looking up every word in *Selection*, had the Russian and German inmates teach me their languages, and translated

Gorky's *The Lower Depths* into Arabic and had it staged. "The officers brought us costumes for the female roles from the women's ward," he reminisces.

Things changed when the prisoners were moved to El-Tor Prison, originally a quarantine for pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia. It was so isolated that prisoners were allowed to wander at will, since any attempt to escape into the surrounding desert was doomed. El-Kharrat was finally released in February 1956, on the occasion of King Farouk's birthday.

Back in Alexandria, searching for a job, El-Kharrat was told of an opening at the National Insurance Company. On his way in for the interview, his eyes fell on a woman, Georgette, who was to become his wife, sitting at the first desk: "petite, beautiful, angelic... it was", he casts around for a suitably discreet phrase, "a *coup de foudre*".

In 1955 El-Kharrat decided to become a writer and resigned from the insurance company, supporting his family, who were unaware of the step he had taken, on his bonus for a few months. During what would have been his office hours El-Kharrat sat at a friend's atelier, completing his first collection of short-stories, *Hizam Aliya* (High Walls). When his bonus ran out, he sent "SOS letters" to friends who found him the job of press officer at the Romanian Embassy in Cairo. "That was in 1956 and in 1957 I got engaged to the girl I had fallen in love with in 1950". A year later they married, in '59 their first son Ihab, now a psychiatrist, was born, followed two years later by Ayman, now a photojournalist.

The '60s saw El-Kharrat embark on his longest professional association, with the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), which he left in 1983 after he had reached the position of assistant secretary-general. El-Kharrat's managerial skills and gift for translation came to the fore in the organisation of conferences. There are, though, two interrelated touchstones of common wisdom about El-Kharrat that probably go back to this phase: that he had reneged on his radical past and that he had turned into a pro-establishment instrument for the oppression of writers, working in close association with the late novelist Youssef El-Siba'i, subsequently dubbed by some "the McCarthy of the Egyptian intelligentsia".

On the former argument, El-Kharrat comments that, yes, he was "no longer politically active on the local national level, but in the Afro-Asian context, in solidarity with the liberation movements." As to his relationship with El-Siba'i, he offers: "I was his right hand and his left hand, too, in the AAPSO. But I never worked in any Egyptian government institution, nor did I publish a single word in *Al-Ahram* during El-Siba'i's tenure as editor-in-chief." Asked in another context about the 13-year gap in his published output between *High Walls*, 1959, and *Rama Wal-Tinnin* (Rama and the Dragon; a novel), 1979, El-Kharrat's answer is revelatory.

There are several explanations for this silence, he says, foremost among them the fact that "at the time, more leftist writers were in prison... so unconsciously I felt guilty about writing when they couldn't — though in fact they wrote their best works in detention." There is also the fact that he was extremely active in translating literary works for the cultural broadcasting channel, the Second Programme. In '68 too, he was one of the founding members of *Gallery '68*, the distinguished periodical that mirrored new trends in Egyptian and international literature. El-Kharrat has consistently championed experimental writing as seen in his critical essays on the poetry of the '70s (then deemed iconoclastic), but which he termed the "new sensibility".

The publication of *Rama and the Dragon* marked a new phase in El-Kharrat's writing and was a milestone in Arabic fiction. The story of a love affair between Mikhail and Rama, a Muslim woman, the novel crystallised the features that have come to characterise El-Kharrat's fictional universe. The non-linear narrative draws on a stream-of-consciousness technique and is interspersed with

dream-like "erotic-mystical" sequences. Each chapter is informed by a central, often mythological image — the synthesising of mythologies being an integral feature. Rama, for all her individuality, is the eternal feminine and Egypt as feminine principle. The figure is primarily associated with Isis who correlates with "The Virgin, mother of Horus, mother of Jesus... Asmode, Persephone, Hera, Demeter, Aphrodite, collective Marys." The significance of the dragon, though it also beckons to the combined symbolism of St George and Horus as well as the conventions of courtly love, is a leitmotif that remains somewhat hermetic.

Then came *City of Saffron* and *Girls of Alexandria*. Last week, El-Kharrat gave the keynote address at the Ninth International Lawrence Durrell Conference in Alexandria, though the two writers' treatment of the city could not be more different. Different not so much because El-Kharrat inscribes the Alexandria of the indigenes (be they Egyptian or less privileged members of foreign communities) while Durrell's cast is of affluent cosmopolitans but because in Durrell Alexandria is a vehicle — be it as literary case study for Einsteinian theory or as metaphor for the Orient of the Orientalist — whereas in El-Kharrat Alexandria simply is. El-Kharrat is an Alexandria intensely experienced, the details of its quotidian pulse in the '40s and '50s religiously registered. Beyond the temporal city is the feminine, life-giving principle perceived by Mikhail in moments of epiphany.

El-Kharrat's rich layering of language is integral to the Alexandrian novels. Here, the register alternates between the various levels of classical and colloquial Arabic incorporating Qur'anic words and argot Alexandria phrases. Indeed, some see in El-Kharrat's more recent works an excessive exercise in verbal self-indulgence. It is a view that overlooks El-Kharrat's commitment

to "trans-generic" writing — an on-going project witnessed in his subtitling of *City of Saffron* as "Alexandrian Texts" and in his reprinting of excerpts from his novels in collages that occupy the space between prose and poetry. Critics like Ibrahim Fahim have recognised the significance of his emphasis on language: "His language is thoroughly rich and of many levels. Whereas previously we were caught between traditional rhetorical modes and the language of journalism, he rates language as an end in itself, not as a vehicle, and this is his contribution."

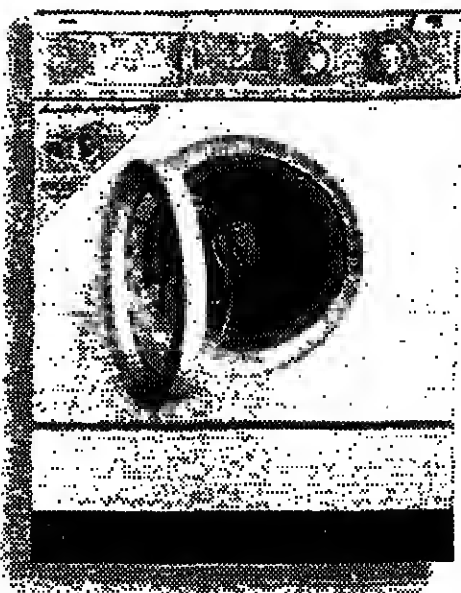
Last month's publication of *Tughian Sawwat El-Tawala* ("Tyranny of the Imperious Infernal") caused the raising of a number of eyebrows. Reproducing lyrical passages from his fiction to be read as poems, the collection also included a number of poems written between 1939 and 1942. Why, argued his detractors, should he publish his juvenilia, unless he is motivated by a huge ego that impels him to publish compulsively? But beyond the integrity of El-Kharrat's poetics, the answer may well be that, like the rest of us, he wrestles with his own demons. His passion for documenting and commenting on his career could be prompted by an apprehension, in his case misplaced, of oblivion. He is currently trying to publish for the first time the poems of a university friend from "the Alexandria school" who committed suicide in the '40s.

El-Kharrat is a familiar face on the Cairo literary scene. To borrow an image much beloved by him, El-Kharrat's is a face reminiscent of Fayoum portraits, images that combine the pagan and the monotheistic, a touch otherworldly, but nevertheless thoroughly expressive and totally individual. But Fayoum or not, his is a face not easily forgotten.

Profile by Hala Halim

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Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostriis

◆ It's been a busy month for Nelson Haddad Herezi, the Chilean ambassador in Cairo. Not that he's complaining, of course, because that's what being an ambassador is all about. Earlier this month, along with Spanish Ambassador Juan Alfonso Ortiz, and Argentinean Ambassador Domingo Santiago Cullen, he inaugurated a marvelous exhibition of paintings and graphics by four artists from the three countries at Al-Hanager Arts Centre. More recently, he met with director-general of the Chilean police force, Fernando Cordera, who was here in Cairo at the invitation of the Egyptian Minister of Interior Hassan El-Ahfi. And finally, last Tuesday evening, on behalf of the president of Chile, Eduardo Frei, Herezi hosted a special reception at his residence, attended by high-ranking members of the Egyptian government and ministry of foreign affairs, as well as several foreign ambassadors, to



bestow the highest Chilean decoration which can be granted to a foreign diplomat, the Grand Cross of Bernardo O'Higgins, to two Egyptians. Assistant minister for American Affairs, ambassador Ihab Wahba, and deputy assistant minister of Cabinet Affairs, ambassador, Nihad Abdel Latif, were awarded the Cross for their brilliant and distinguished services in strengthening bilateral relations between Egypt and Chile.



◆ What's this I see before me, even as I write this? Why, it's a copy of the *Cyprus Mail*. And what's that I see on the front page? Why, it's a rather brilliant photograph of an abandoned airport in Nicosia, taken by none other than the *Weekly's* very own, and my good friend, Jihan Ammar. Out of hundreds of photographs submitted by 12 press photographers from seven Eastern Mediterranean countries attending a four-day MedMedia photo-journalism workshop in Cyprus a few weeks ago, Jihan's was chosen as the best, and published on the front page of the country's leading English-language daily.

◆ Miniature plastic pharaohs

From front page to back page, Jihan's photograph graces the *Cyprus Mail* and the *Weekly* (far left); German folk songs resound throughout the Giza Plateau

and Folkdance Competition, organised by the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) and the Opera House, and whose judging committee was graced with renowned Egyptian soprano, Rehana El-Herfi. To welcome the 300 singers during their week-long stay, the minister hosted a reception party in the Grand Hotel by the Pyramids, and soon after, the members were treated to dinner by head of the ETA, Adel Abdel-Aziz, on one of the Nile's fabulous floating restaurants. Before the competition began, the singers were taken on a tour of the Citadel, the Egyptian Museum, and the Pyramids, where the German choral troupe quite spontaneously decided to rehearse and burst into glorious song before my very eyes.

RAMSES HILTON 1 - TEL : 5147435
HORREYA 1 - TEL : 4529980